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CLASSIC MYSTERY AND DETECTIVE STORIES OF ALL NATIONS

TEN VOLUMES

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MODERN FRENCH FRENCH NOVELS OLD TIME ENGLISH
MODERN ENGLISH AMERICAN REAL LIFE

TRANSLATORS

whose work is represented in this collection of "CLASSIC MYSTERY *and* DETECTIVE STORIES," many here rendered into English for the first time

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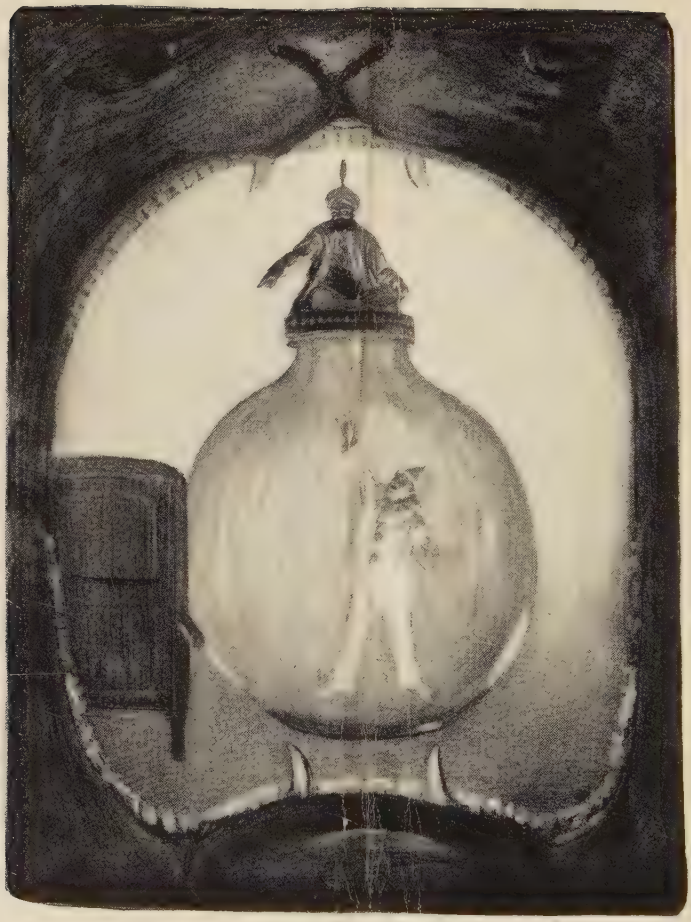

"Pointed in Wild Frenzy to the One Sitting Above"

Drawing by Power O'Malley. To illustrate "The Man on the Bottle," by Gustave Meyrink

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CLASSIC MYSTERY AND DETECTIVE STORIES

EDITED BY

JULIAN HAWTHORNE

GERMAN

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PART I

Friedrich Spielhagen

The Skeleton in the House

Friedrich Spielhagen

The Skeleton in the House

I

"AND this is our sleeping-room," said Lebrecht, opening the door. "How do you like it?"

"Charming!" replied Annchen.

She had paused a moment on the threshold and allowed her eyes to wander around the apartment, then with a few rapid steps reached the fireplace and threw herself into an armchair.

"Oh, dear! how tired I am."

Lebrecht bit his lip, and his handsome face, that had just been smiling so expectantly, darkened. Annchen could not see it, for she had put her feet on the brass fender and leaned her head back on the cushions; but as he now passed her for the second time, stepping lightly in spite of the thick Brussels carpet, she put out her hand and said beseechingly:

"Don't be angry with me, Lebrecht!"

He had caught the slender hand and raised it to his lips.

"Why should I be angry with you?" he murmured very indistinctly, for his heart was throbbing so that it almost choked him. If she held his hand, if a loving glance flashed from her eyes, if her lips parted to kiss him, then he would tell her.

But the brown eyes remained weary; the charming, half-parted lips did not move; the hand fell carelessly from his into her lap. His knees, which had already bent, grew stiff again; he turned away, and only with the utmost effort repressed the sigh in which his tortured heart sought relief.

So the story was again deferred until the morrow, as it had been every evening during the six weeks of their wedding-tour. But this evening, the first at home, was not exactly like the others. There was really no morrow to it; he had staked the remnant of his courage, his final hope, on it, as the gambler risks the remnant of his property on a

last card. He must tell to-morrow of course, but that he would be compelled to do so was the most terrible thing of all. It would then no longer be a confession—simply a disclosure, which by no silence, no deception, no miserable pretense could he delay longer, and he would stand like a criminal who, after obstinate, hardened denials, is at last convicted and cannot even make the slightest claim to extenuating circumstances—can offer no reason why the judge should not contemptuously turn away his angry face from the shameless fellow.

And this angry judge would be his young, beautiful, worshipped wife, who trusted him so wholly, so entirely, who only yesterday morning—— Oh! how was it possible that when she hid her blushing face on his shoulder and said, amid smiles and tears: "Only your dear, faithful eyes; I want nothing more," he could have laughed, kissed her again and again, and—not told her?

He had approached the window, drawn back the heavy curtains, and was gazing into the gloom of the autumn evening, while the strong breath of the sea blew through the ancient trees, till the branches creaked and groaned and the withered leaves dashed rustling against the panes.

He was thinking of that wretched evening late in the summer and the mad rush through the room to this very window.

He had thrown it open, scarcely knowing that he did so, eagerly inhaling the cold, damp air that blew into his face and cooled his burning brow.

"There is a terrible draught, my dear Lebrecht," said Annchen from the fireside.

"I beg your pardon."

He shut the window, let the curtains fall, and came back into the room. His wife had not changed her position; this utter listlessness of one usually so elastic, gay, vivacious, and full of prattle from morning till night vexed him in his despairing mood.

"You are tired, Annchen," he said dryly; "you ought to go to bed."

"I'm not at all tired," she answered, "only a little lazy. I think it's the long drive and the keen wind that constantly blew into our faces."

"I couldn't help the latter, Annchen. We are in Pomerania and by the sea, which has nothing in common with your mild Rhine breezes; and as for the drive, I was very sorry afterwards. I meant well; you ought at least to acknowledge that."

Annchen sat erect in her armchair. This was the first time she had heard a tone so cold, nay, even harsh, from her Lebrecht's lips. She gazed at him with more astonishment than fear.

"Pardon me," he said, "I meant no reproach; the words escaped me. I don't know what it is; I believe I'm tired myself—nervous."

"We'll rest awhile," said Annchen. "Let me stay here in the chair—it's delightfully comfortable—and do you lie on the couch yonder. Then we'll have a nice supper; to judge from the fire Frau Uelzen has made in the kitchen, there must be a brilliant result."

"I'm only afraid you will be kept waiting some time," said Lebrecht; "you know she expected us two hours later."

"I'm in no hurry; on the contrary," replied Annchen, "I'm really too worn out to be able to eat now. I'll ask for a cup of coffee first; that will revive me more quickly. The whole house was scented with freshly-roasted coffee; I believe I can smell it here."

Lebrecht, who had stretched himself on the couch, started up with a bound.

"Good Heavens! what's the matter, Lebrecht?"

"Matter! Nothing! I only wanted to go and tell Frau Uelzen."

The young wife had also hastily risen. "Good heavens!" she exclaimed again, "how pale you are. You are certainly not well. Tell me!"

She laid her hand on his forehead; it was cold and damp. He pushed the hand away almost angrily.

"You are really ill, Lebrecht? Sha'n't we send for your friend?"

"That's just what was wanting," cried Lebrecht with a forced smile. "He makes short work of imaginary invalids. Besides, he'll probably come this evening at any rate, though I would rather he did not."

"Why?"

"I thought it would be pleasanter for us to remain the first evening undisturbed. You know that was one reason why we didn't take the express train."

"But, as you remember, against my will, and I believe I was right. I think it would have been pleasanter if your friends and the gentlemen had received us."

"I have no friend except Bertram; and as for the gentlemen, they can pay their respects to-morrow."

"That isn't it, Lebrecht; it's only——"

"That you feel solitary, alone with me in the dreary old house."

Annchen flushed to her temples. "For shame, Lebrecht!"

"And yet it's true, Annchen!"

"And I say again, 'For shame!'"

It had become an actual dispute—a real quarrel, at least in Frau Uelzen's ears; and if these ears did not hear aright, it certainly was not the fault of their owner, who had already been standing before the door for some minutes in so uncomfortable an attitude that her back was beginning to ache.

Therefore, and also because the quarrel seemed to be over and there was nothing more to be heard, she straightened her little fat figure again and knocked.

It was the master who instantly opened the door, and so suddenly that Frau Uelzen received a hard bump, and could not help rubbing her elbow while she told him that the Herr Doctor had just called and was in his room.

Annchen had also appeared in the half-open doorway.

"I should like to send him away again," said Lebrecht, hesitatingly.

"On no account," cried Annchen. "I'll come, too; I'll only change my dress a little."

"If he's to stay all the evening, you needn't hurry."

"So much the better, dear Lebrecht."

She wanted to throw her arms around her husband's neck, but the inquisitive eyes in Frau Uelzen's fat face embarrassed her; so she only put her finger on her lips. "*Au revoir,* then. Give my compliments to your friend, and don't forget to tell Frau Uelzen about the coffee."

"No, no!" said Lebrecht, pushing Frau Uelzen out of the room and, without having once looked back, shutting the door so violently behind him that Annchen, with a rapid movement, had barely time to draw the hem of her dress out of the crack.

"He's angry with me," she murmured, "and I have deserved it. When he goes down and meets the horrible man he calls his only friend—in what a tone he said it, 'My only friend.' And now he's sitting with him pouring out his heart, and telling him he has a little, unreasonable, foolish wife, and that he" (tears gushed from her eyes; she threw herself into the armchair again, covering her face with her hands and sobbing) "is not happy—that I have made him unhappy! No, no! not unhappy, but not so happy as he deserves to be, as I have hoped, dreamed, I should make him—I, who love him so dearly!"

She had suddenly stretched out both arms as if she wanted to embrace her beloved husband. The arms fell on her lap; she sat gazing before her with fixed eyes into the dying fire.

And as the little blue flames leaped busily up and down the fading coals, so before her mental vision picture after picture, scene after scene, came and went—the thousand pictures, the thousand scenes of her short love-life, which had bloomed so brightly, so blissfully, shone with such a radiant light, and was now sinking into ashes.

There was the steamer's deck, on which he paced to and fro alone, with the red book under his arm, gazing with thoughtful blue eyes at the vineyards and castles. She had noticed the tall, fair man long before her friends began to jest about the "stiff Englishman," while Cousin Arthur twisted his black moustache and swayed to and fro, as if to

say: "Thank Heaven! I'm not like that stupid fellow." Cousin Arthur had made a very wry face when papa brought up the stranger, whom in his good-nature he had accosted, and introduced him to the ladies as Herr Lebrecht Nudel, a merchant from Woldom. "Lebrecht Nudel" was a most charming name, Cousin Arthur said, and "who can tell me where Woldom is?"

A few days later Cousin Arthur knew very well where Woldom was, and in the interim had had plenty of time to become accustomed to the name that had at first appeared so comical, for it was mentioned often enough in the beautiful, hospitable home of Annchen's parents, through whose door Herr Nudel, who was obliged to stay a few days in Cologne, went in and out.

The few days had grown into a fortnight, and Herr Nudel's business matters were prolonged into the third week; and poor Arthur—he wanted to shoot himself, and would have done so, "'pon honor," only that he would then have lost the pleasure of dancing at her wedding and showing her that in his veins flowed the true, noble blood of the Klüngel-Pütz, and not a base stream which had blended with the mouldy Schmitz current till it was unrecognizable, like that in his cousin's. Mamma had been on his side; she would have so willingly made the bare Klungel-Pütz family-tree put forth new blossoms with the Schmitz gold; but dear papa, in his quiet, easy fashion, had stood faithfully by his beloved little daughter. Arthur ought to be glad to get a cousin who might occasionally take up an inconvenient note and afterwards, if he desired, use it for a lamp-lighter. In spite of the Klüngel-Pütz relationship and his own rank among the patrician families of Cologne, he was a simple, commonplace man, who had just money enough to duly estimate the value of money. Nay, he confessed to being so base-minded that his son-in-law's two millions really impressed him, and if Annchen loved the man—well, Heaven knows how gladly he would have kept her near him, but Woldom was also, so to speak, in the world. He hoped, reluctant as he was to travel, to convince himself of it in

his own person, and drink the young couple's health in genuine Rhine wine on the shore of the Baltic out of the bowl of the King of Prussia sent to the King of Woldom.

To the King of Woldom!

A banker in Berlin of whom he had privately inquired about the property of the "produce-dealer" had not only confirmed the similar statements of the London and Hamburg firms to whom Lebrecht had referred him, but added: "I even think the man much richer; he is, in truth, what our late witty king called his father. Let him tell you the story himself, as a clever physician from Woldom, whose acquaintance I made last summer in Heringsdorf, told it to me."

And Lebrecht related it with downcast eyes, as if he were ashamed, and an unsteady voice, like a person who has to confess a crime.

And yet it was the most harmless anecdote in the world: how the late king, who was so fond of being in Pomerania and Rügen, also visited Woldom and graciously accepted the lodgings offered him in the old gable-roofed house on the market-place. And as next morning he permitted his host to show him the modest sights of the city, and his father, in reply to the constant questions of the eager monarch: "Who built this quay? To whom do these warehouses belong? Who owns these ships? Who laid out this promenade? Who built this poorhouse?" etc., in accordance with the truth could only reply: "I, your majesty. To me, your majesty," until the king, who had become very thoughtful, suddenly stood still and exclaimed: "Why, really, this is exactly like that charming story of Hebel's, 'Kannitverstan,' only that there is no misunderstanding, but the truth." And then, turning to his suite and pointing to Herr Nudel: "I tell you, gentlemen, if I were not unfortunately the King of Prussia I should like to be the King of Woldom."

And on the magnificent bowl of embossed silver which came from Berlin six months after, the coat-of-arms of the city of Woldom glittered beside the royal arms of Prussia, and below the interlaced initials of the royal name and his

father's stood in gold letters: "From the grateful King of Prussia to his colleague of Woldom."

How often Lebrecht had been obliged to relate the story, and how heartily her papa had laughed every time and her proud mother smiled. And she herself—she had only gazed at her Lebrecht's face, now a thousand times dearer in its touching embarrassment, and said to herself: "He is a king —I his queen! Oh! how happy we shall be."

"We shall be!" They were not yet entirely so, at least Lebrecht was not, and how could she be if he were not? He did not feel at ease in her home. Of course he stood on excellent terms with papa; that was natural; who could help being fond of the kind old papa, who wished everybody well, and certainly the future husband of his beloved only child? Mamma did not mean any harm—of course not—but it was undoubtedly a hard, hard task for Lebrecht, who was so averse to all ostentation, to see himself constantly engaged in conversations that always had the same object—the glorification of the race of Klüngel-Pütz; how brilliant it had once been, with its fifty castles on the Rhine; how it was related to the Sickingens and other families of the highest nobility, and had even been allied to the imperial house of Hapsburg; and how the splendor had gradually paled like the setting sun, until—oh, cruel fate!—a Klüngel-Pütz, she herself, married a plebeian, and the daughter of this marriage, according to those iron laws that rule over the rise and fall of great families, was again wedding a plebeian.

And if Lebrecht could not get along with mamma, neither could he acquire a taste for the gay bustle in the house. The constant coming and going of so many people disturbed him. He didn't say so, but it was not necessary; she saw it distinctly in an occasional sad, almost angry glance which, when he thought himself unobserved, wandered over the motley throng—officers with clanking spurs and rattling sabers; at their head the slender Arthur, who took his part of rejected lover now on the tragic and now on the comic side, and made himself as insufferable in the one as in the other; dandified, smooth-talking referendaries and assessors,

who were almost all reserve-officers, and carried on a secret or open jealous warfare with their comrades of the line, whose cause she—she herself—had been for several years of her young life.

She could not, would not, deny this when Lebrecht intimated it, nor that these years had been pleasant ones; that she had rejoiced in her triumphs with all her heart; that she had firmly believed in the beatific power of sails on the Rhine and Moselle, officers' and jurists' balls, till she saw him, the blond Englishman, the Pomeranian produce-dealer, the King of Woldom. And now away with that cloud from your dear brow, my beloved royal master! It isn't at all becoming to you, and moreover, is a culpable doubt of my love, or must I doubt yours?

Ah! she had not doubted his love, not for a second, and yet the cloud she believed she had kissed away the first time for ever returned again and again, and grown darker and darker, as the covering of ashes yonder fell thicker on the dying coals. And she had noticed on their wedding-journey that this darkness increased in proportion as they approached his home—nay, she afterward remembered exactly how on the day they left the Lake of Como, to return by Venice, Vienna, Prague, and Dresden, a turning-point began in his mood. She had pondered and pondered over what it could be, what was passing in his mind when he sat for minutes—nay, afterward for hours—at the theaters and on the endless railway journeys, gazing into vacancy in a sort of stupor, and then suddenly—invariably after a stolen glance at her, who had silently watched him—renewed the interrupted conversation or commenced a new one. Were there business cares? He had assured her it was nothing of the sort. Did he feel sick? He had never been better. Did he no longer love her? He closed her mouth with passionate kisses. Was he not happy?

At last no other question remained, and precisely because there was no other, his assurance that he was happy—nay, that he could scarcely realize the excess of happiness with which her love overwhelmed him—could not soothe her; for now it

was no longer the too lively social atmosphere of her parents' house that had so oppressed him; now he no longer had to endure her mamma's long-winded lectures about the splendor and decay of her family; this and everything else that had been so uncomfortable to the betrothed bridegroom lay behind them forever; he had her, her alone, among all the thousands of indifferent persons who crowded past them—alone as if they were on Robinson Crusoe's island.

Was it not to deceive her about the real cause of his trouble when he said with a melancholy smile: "I will believe that you could be happy with me on a Robinson Crusoe island, as I certainly should be with you; but in Woldom—in Woldom, the little, gloomy city on the shore of the gray Baltic Sea—in Woldom, where theaters are a fiction and concerts a legend, where one can have no embarrassment in the choice of society, because there is simply no society at all—there might often be difficulties in the way of happiness—might be very many days in which you would say: 'You don't please me.'"

In vain she answered, at first eagerly, then almost with secret anger and ill-repressed tears:

"Granted that it is all as you say, but do I hear this for the first time? Didn't you say the same things when I did not know that you loved me? No! I knew that from the first moment; and you knew that I loved you and would follow you to the ends of the earth, let alone to your home, which you describe so dismally. I quietly allowed you to talk and only asked: 'Do you like it?' You replied: 'I think it more beautiful almost everywhere else, which, to be sure, does not require much, and yet I believe I could live nowhere else.' And then I said: 'Neither can I.' And what I said then I say still; and you—you must believe me till I have given you proofs of the contrary. Until then, if you love me, not a word more about it."

He had not returned to the disagreeable subject during the past week. This morning in Berlin he had first reverted to it again.

They had originally intended to travel on the afternoon

express train, that reached Woldom at ten o'clock in the evening, and he had already telegraphed home so the evening before. Then he had changed his arrangements singularly, as he usually clung to his resolutions, which he only formed after mature consideration, with a certain degree of obstinacy. This time it was different. It had occurred to him too late, that if they should arrive at the appointed hour certain formalities of reception could not be escaped, although the clerks in the counting-house knew, or might know, what a declared enemy he was of all such nonsense. Speeches would be made which he should have to answer; there would be an hour's confusion, very probably a noisy evening, and he longed for rest. He could—they could procure this rest by a very simple expedient: they need only, instead of taking the afternoon express train, use the morning one. To be sure, it was an accommodation train, and stopped at every station, but they would still reach home a few hours earlier.

She had acquiesced—not that the plan pleased her; on the contrary, she thought it perfectly proper that the clerks should give their employer a formal reception after he had been absent from home six weeks, and was now returning with his young wife. She had no dislike for the "fuss," and if it was a little gay, or even noisy, so much the better. But after a few timid, useless objections she had wisely kept silence, and hastily packed her things in the morning.

So they had set out early, gladly as she would have slept an hour longer. The last days of travel had been very fatiguing, and she felt for the first time really exhausted. Yet she had allowed nothing to be noticed, had not even tried to sleep during the journey, though, to be sure, several times she could not wholly repress a slight yawn. But the more trouble she took to make the best of everything, the more dissatisfied and impatient Lebrecht was. The affair was worse than he supposed; the slow motion, the constant stopping—it was insufferable. He walked up and down the coupé—as usual, they traveled first class, and were alone—shut the windows, opened them again, grumbled at the

conductor, scolded the guard, and spoke so angrily to a gentleman, who at a station came to the window, and, judging from his mode of address, was a resident of Woldom, and even a business acquaintance, that the man seemed utterly bewildered, and she herself was really alarmed by the violence of one usually so quiet and composed.

To be sure, he instantly apologized, and she heard him, opening the window, tell the man that they would discuss the matter further in Büssow.

Then the walking up and down the coupé began again, and suddenly stopping, he said: "Büssow is the station from which the branch railway goes to Woldom. We shall be obliged to wait there an hour for the train from Lundin. It's a horrible delay, and I shall be helplessly delivered over to that detestable talker. I'll make you a proposal. From the next station the old highway leads to Woldom. The distance is four or five miles. It is now two o'clock; and if we take a carriage there we can be in Woldom almost as soon as this hateful train. We'll leave our baggage behind and be our own masters. I've walked, ridden, and driven over the road hundreds of times as a boy and young man, when there was no railway here. It is not beautiful, nothing is in this country; but to me every poplar with which it is planted represents a pleasant memory. And you can take the drive as a trial whether my descriptions of the country and people agree with truth or not. Will you?"

Of course she had consented.

It was a hard test, and she had more than once been forced to confess that Lebrecht had exaggerated nothing. True, she had not seen much of the people, but all the more of the country—endless brown moors and gray fields, over which swept a damp, cold wind, wet and cold and raw, such as in her beautiful Rhenish home a December wind scarcely was, and they were in the latter part of October. From time to time on these dreary plains appeared a solitary farmhouse, surrounded by trees and bushes, a mill on the top of one of the rare low hills, at a greater or less distance dark patches of woodlands. She tried to persuade herself that all this

must look very pretty in summer, when the meadows were green, the heaths bloomed, the boundless fields swayed with golden waves, and the larks soared trilling upward to a blue sky studded with large white clouds; but the gray, rainy reality ruthlessly expunged the bright visions of fancy; for now it had begun to rain, and in the little two-seated, open carriage—Lebrecht had called it a Holstein—they were fully exposed to the weather.

She would have cheerfully endured all this, and even a great deal more—although to-day, with her physical exhaustion, the fatigue and discomfort were really harder to bear than usual—if Lebrecht had been more cheerful, if on his native soil he had at least regained the calm, self-possessed manner that had so charmed her, and in her young eyes made the fair, tall North-German seem like a king among the vivacious throng of her courtiers. But this was unfortunately by no means the case. As he had just declared the annoyances of the railway unendurable, he now quarreled with the situation he had himself caused, as if other people's imprudence or obstinacy had forced it upon him. With his traveling-cap drawn far over his brow, and the collar of his overcoat turned up, he sat leaning back in his corner, like a person who at least will not waste a word upon a disappointment he cannot change. And this silence made her far more uneasy than his previous violence. At last she, too, no longer ventured to speak, and now had abundant time to listen to the rattling of the leather on the carriage, the creaking of the axles, the grating of the wheels, the clattering of the horses' hoofs, the long-drawn notes of the wind that roared over the wet fields and bent the sighing poplars aside. Oh, those sighing poplars! If each really brought some youthful memory to Lebrecht, as he had said, how sorrowful that youth must have been! She wrapped a handkerchief around her head to hear the terrible sighing somewhat less distinctly, and closed her eyes for fifteen minutes together, in order to no longer see the ghostly nodding of the tree-tops.

Soon she did not need the latter precaution; the heavy

masses of clouds grew darker and more threatening, and seemed to have sunk lower every time she looked up at them again; evening closed in and became night, though it could be little more than seven o'clock. No friendly star in the sky, no cheering light on the earth; only once a faint glimmer appeared at one side of the road to instantly vanish again, and the coachman said: "Gallows Hill!" They were the first words the man, who sat leaning forward over his horses, had spoken during the whole drive.

She pondered over what he meant. Did the ominous place have any special association for him, as the sighing poplars had for Lebrecht? Did a gallows really still tower yonder into the black night? Was it a hellish fire glimmering there, or the lamplight from the sitting-room of a peaceful mill? Had the silent man only meant that the drive was approaching an end and other lights would soon emerge from the gloom?

Thank God! there were really other lights—two, three, four—a whole row, the lights of the railway station, Lebrecht said; then another bit of highroad without poplars; then on the right and left low, square houses with dimly-lighted windows amid large, dark masses—barns belonging to the farmers in the suburbs; a gateway at whose entrance and exit a lantern suspended by chains was swayed by the wind; somewhat better lighted, broader streets, with, as it seemed, handsome houses; finally a small, square, open space, with the harbor on one side. She heard through the howling of the wind the roar of the sea, and saw, though indistinctly, against the now lighter sky, tall, swaying masts. And now several buildings appeared before her, towering like castles from amid their lowly surroundings. On the left was the lofty, gable-roofed Rathhaus; on the right, divided from it only by a narrow street, a still higher house —his house, which was now to be hers also—the house he had so often described to her, and which now, as, still sitting in the carriage, she cast a timid glance at it by the dim glimmer of the lanterns scattered here and there about the market-place and the lights flickering from the windows,

towered into the black night-heavens, a mute, dark, stony secret.

And now the huge door was slowly opened. Old Balthazar—she knew his name long before—stood there, and instantly vanished again as the wind extinguished the light behind the bony hand. She would have liked to laugh—it was just as if the old man had only wanted to show his huge, copper-red nose—but she could not. There was the threshold which, in imagination, she had already so often crossed, leaning on the arm of her beloved Lebrecht, and—"Go in!" impatiently cried Lebrecht, who was paying the driver. He had undoubtedly meant kindly, and yet the words sounded unpleasantly in her spoiled ears. True, he had been at her side again ere she had taken many steps in the wide lower hall, where Frau Uelzen, with many courtesies and exclamations of surprise at the unexpected arrival of her employers, was already welcoming her. And, leaning on his arm, she had ascended the broad oak staircase which, commencing in the center of the lower hall, led, with several landings and queer, low steps, between colossal black banisters, to a wide gallery which, like the staircase, was bordered with huge, black rails, and on which all the rooms in the second story appeared to open.

And, leaning on his arm, she had walked through the rooms, preceded by Frau Uelzen with the lamp, while Balthazar behind then lighted the candles on the tables and consoles.

And, because it constantly grew light behind them, she had felt as if she were walking through a labyrinth in which she could never find her way, and then Lebrecht had opened the last door and said, "This is our sleeping-room;" and then——

The magnificent clock on the chimney-piece struck eight in low, silvery tones. Annchen started up, like a person suddenly aroused from a long sleep in which he has dreamed infinite things—infinite things, through whose confusion he sought only one, which he could not find.

No, she had not slept, and they were no dreams that had

darted through her head and heart in strange, wild haste, while she sat gazing at the tiny blue flames quivering over the coals fading into ashes; it was her whole, short love-life which she had lived over again within a few minutes, embraced in a single glance, as the traveler beholds a wide landscape with all its countless details, while he still looks only at the cloud just rising above the horizon, and which the anxious guide has said, ere the near goal can be reached, will overspread the whole, beautiful, laughing world with a gray veil and efface it with floods of rain.

The anxious guide—her throbbing, reproachful heart! She had ill sustained the test!

When had she ever allowed bad weather to rob her of her gay spirits? How was it the afternoon they were surprised by a storm on the Löwenburg, during an excursion to the Liebengebirge, and then also in a pouring rain, and finally in total darkness, and, moreover, on foot, obliged to retrace the long road to Königswinter? But, to be sure, she had leaned on his arm, and every obstacle they were forced to conquer on their way had only been one cause the more for jest and laughter and happiness. If to-day he sat by her side silent and ill-humored, ought she not to have soothed him by redoubled cheerfulness, she who could be so gay, whom he so liked to see bright and mirthful? Had he not, perhaps, only waited for that? Had he not taken her weary silence for a proof that his fears were being fulfilled, and she found his beloved Pomerania detestable? And when they entered the house, when she passed through the rooms —yes, he had hurried very much, but why had she permitted it, why not insisted on being allowed to admire the princely magnificence with which everything was fitted up? And when they finally entered this apartment, which seemed to be no room at all, but a huge tent hung and furnished with blue and silver, so elegant, so rich, and yet so cozy and comfortable—as she had imagined and in a mirthful moment chanced to describe to him in a few jesting words; he, dear fellow, had remembered, understood, known how to make everything a thousand times more beautiful—and she, had

she thrown herself into his arms? Had she thanked him for his solicitude, his kindness, his love? Had she said: "I will make your dark house as bright by my love as a dew-drop in the morning sunlight, and kiss the clouds from your brow, you dear, foolish fellow; I'll make you as happy as I am myself?"

Alas! she had said nothing, nothing of all this. She had thrown herself into the chair, and by her silly conduct, for the first time since she had known him, extorted a harsh word from her kind husband; and when he left her just now the cloud on his brow was darker than it had ever been before—the cloud that did not rest there to-day for the first time, so it was not caused by her behavior—the fatal cloud that had already shadowed it for weeks, and consequently must have some deeper source, and could only rise from the one thought: "I have been mistaken in you; you are not the woman who can make me happy!"

And as all her reflecting led her this time to precisely the same sorrowful conclusion which her meditations always reached, poor Annchen, like a child that no longer sees any escape from the pursuing danger, burst into loud sobs, bending forward and covering her face with her hands, while the tears trickled through her slender fingers.

Thus she could not see the fat housekeeper, who, after tapping gently—very gently—without waiting for a "Come in," had opened the door a little—a very little—and for half a minute peered through the crack, then cautiously shut it, knocked loudly as if it were the first time, and entered, an officious smile on her thick lips, bringing on a waiter the cup of coffee her mistress had just ordered.

II

Annchen had started up in terror, and tried as well as she could to conceal her tears. It seemed impossible that Frau Uelzen should have noticed nothing, though the latter by no means acted as if she had, but, drawing up a small marble

table and setting the coffee on it, begged her mistress to pardon the long delay and excuse her if she did not serve as skilfully as the maid whom the Herr Commerzienrath and Frau Commerzienräthen would probably bring in a week.

"I don't know whether my parents will make their promised visit so soon," said Annchen.

"My master thought so," replied Frau Uelzen, "and I think they certainly will. The parents long for their little daughter, and the little daughter for her dear parents. They have never been separated in their lives and suddenly are forced to part, but it is very painful. I've lived with a great many couples who were just married and loved each other like turtle doves. Dear me! Only people can't live on love alone, so to speak, but require many other things; and before all are found months and years elapse, and oftentimes they don't find them at all."

Lebrecht had taken care that Annchen did not enter the house with too high an opinion of Frau Uelzen. He had called her a person who, though useful enough in her way, had many weaknesses, among which, in his eyes, or rather his ears, an unconquerable loquacity was the worst. And her cautious mamma, during the last few days before her marriage, had repeatedly warned her to be on good terms with the influential person who had already taken charge of the housekeeping ten years, at least at first, until she herself should feel "firm ground under her feet."

But Annchen was now thinking of anything rather than these warnings and precautions. What the stout old lady yonder, with her fat hands folded over her stomach, was saying in her comfortable, slow fashion, in that delicious dialect which she had first heard from Lebrecht, and which, therefore, was so dear to her, was certainly all true. So, too, a voice from her oppressed soul had spoken.

"Don't find them at all!" she repeated.

Frau Uelzen had already feared she might have gone a little too far at first. Now, since her words had evidently found so good a reception in her young mistress's heart, she continued calmly:

"Yes, indeed, not at all; though one must never allow it, and always put the best face on everything, and thus inspire a poor young lady with courage, as I always did young Frau von Nulzow, before whose marriage I kept house six months alone for the young baron, who was a kind master, though he had his peculiarities, like all of us, and often drank a bottle more than was good for him. Well, if that were a reason for a young wife to be unhappy there wouldn't be many happy ones, at least not in our country; and my young mistress was unhappy from the depths of her heart, and remained so, no matter what I might say, and one morning we found her in the pond at the end of the park, but she had been dead several hours."

"Merciful Heavens!" cried Annchen. "And was it never discovered why she took her life?"

"Never exactly," replied Frau Uelzen, shaking her head. "Some say she had had a lover before, a lieutenant, who remained in Bohemia, and whom she would gladly have married, only her parents wouldn't consent, and she was forced to marry my master, and the other—that was the lieutenant—shot himself. But that's mere gossip; she never told me anything about it, and she would surely have done so if there had been anything of the sort; for she was very well satisfied with me, and always said, 'As you choose, Frau Uelzen;' or, 'Do it just as you please, Frau Uelzen.' And what can so young a lady do better than trust to a sensible old person who understands housekeeping and never wants anything for her own good, only for her employers'? For there's no dependence upon servants, especially here in Woldom, where the devil of emigration gets into their heads because one or another has made a fortune in America. And then people say it's my fault that nobody stays with us long; but you'll soon be convinced that I'm not to blame for it."

Annchen, while slowly sipping the excellent coffee, had been thinking of the unfortunate young wife who had drowned herself, nobody knew why, and had no idea how Frau Uelzen from this tragical incident had reached the

servant question; but she did not wish to let her inattention be noticed, and therefore said haphazard: "Why should it be your fault?"

"Isn't that so?" asked Frau Uelzen eagerly. "Why should it be my fault? I can't help it that the house is older than the Sweden wall before the Lundin gate and that people say: 'If all the persons born in this house were still alive, everybody else would have to leave the city.' Well, if a young thing who comes into the house gets frightened and wants to go away again in six weeks, after all it's perfectly natural; for to hear old Balthazar, who lived thirty years with the late Herr Senator, and has already been five with the young master, talk about all he has heard and seen—one wouldn't believe it till one heard him tell it; how, when there's nobody in the room, you can hear breathing, as if somebody were sleeping close beside you in the bed. I've heard that myself a thousand times; even Dörthe must admit it. She's our new cook, whom we've had only six weeks, and I don't yet know whether she amounts to much, for she laughs all day long; but the old one wouldn't answer any longer; at last she scarcely talked of anything else, and would probably have blurted it out to you the very first evening; and the two housemaids said then I must give them their recommendations immediately, too, for nobody could vanish without flying, and the whole city said so; and therefore I told them they needn't stay, and gave them their recommendations at once. For even if the new ones, whom you can now choose yourself, are no different, you'll at least have some peace from their stupid gossip during the first few days; and even that is worth something. Wasn't I right, madam?"

"I really don't know what you are talking about," replied Annchen.

A half-embarrassed, half-angry smile flitted over the housekeeper's fat face.

"Ah! you don't know—really don't know? Then I beg a thousand pardons. I'm certainly not one of those who can't keep their mouths shut; and when my master says:

'Frau Uelzen, don't speak of it; it's to be a surprise,' I don't speak of it. And if he had said: 'Frau Uelzen, don't say anything to your mistress about what happened to me with Herr Fliederbusch,' I should have said nothing, you can depend upon that. Have you any orders to give?"

Frau Uelzen courtesied, and, as an answer did not come immediately, was silently retiring in the consciousness of her insulted dignity as housekeeper, then paused irresolutely; the large, brown eyes of her young mistress, who had suddenly started from her chair, gazed at her so inquiringly, and at the same time, Frau Uelzen thought, with such a terrified look.

"Why, do you really know nothing about it?" asked Frau Uelzen.

A scarcely perceptible shake of the head was the reply. Frau Uelzen clasped her hands in honest amazement and exclaimed:

"Dear me! now I really don't know whether I ought to say more. For if my master has said nothing about it—well, he has a good conscience and can run the risk; and besides, he surely doesn't know how people talk, otherwise he would certainly have told you how it happened, because you must learn it before you've been in Woldom twenty-four hours longer, and since, after all, it will be just as well for you to hear the story from me, because I mean kindly, and at least know what I know, and how it began, and the others know nothing at all; and if the people say I was jealous of Herr Fliederbusch—but my master has probably told you about Herr Fliederbusch?"

"I don't remember," said Annchen sadly.

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Frau Uelzen.

Annchen had seated herself in the chair, displaying a calmness that her trembling knees and throbbing heart belied. In spite of her bewilderment, she keenly felt the impropriety of allowing this garrulous old person to inform her of things and persons about which Lebrecht had hitherto kept silence. But suppose this had not been accidental? Suppose he had only kept silence in order not to alarm her? Suppose his

restlessness, his ill-humor, his gloomy manner, that had already caused her so much anxiety, should now find an unexpected explanation? Suppose she could say to him this evening: "I know it now, Lebrecht"? What? Merciful Heavens! what? It was certainly something very, very unpleasant—something really terrible; that was evident enough from the old woman's previous words; but in comparison to the terrible thought she had had in her mind all this time, which had made her so wretched——

"Won't you sit down?" said Annchen, pointing to a chair that stood near.

Frau Uelzen availed herself of the permission only too willingly. So good an opportunity to let her light shine before a young wife who had just set foot in the house had not come in her way during all the many years of her service as housekeeper. Her little fat figure really seemed to grow, as, taking a seat on the extreme edge of the chair, and smoothing her black silk apron with her red hands, while a self-satisfied smile rested on her broad mouth, she said:

"Don't look so anxiously at the clock. When the Herr Doctor is with the master he always stays a long time; and to-night it'll be longer, for Balthazar, who just took in a bottle of wine—that's always the first thing when the doctor comes, but I mean nothing, madam; God forbid!—says they're already talking about it. And the doctor goes about the city so much, and always took a great deal of interest in Herr Fliederbusch, who lost his mother long ago and had only an old aunt, a shipmaster's widow. Her brother, Herr Fliederbusch's father, was a ship's captain, and sailed for us many years, until he—how long ago was it? Yes; in the spring we had the fire on the dike, and in the autumn the *Anna Maria* was wrecked and all the crew drowned, and Herr Fliederbusch too—the father, I mean—and in the winter the boy came to our house. It's six years ago, and he was then fourteen, and so would now be twenty if——"

"Is he dead?" exclaimed Annchen in terror.

Frau Uelzen cast a sorrowful glance at the ceiling. "Why, that's just what nobody knows and what they're

racking their brains about; for everybody knew him, and it was Hans Fliederbusch here, and Hans Fliederbusch there. He was called Hans, and was a regular Hans Dampf in every street, though he's said to have been very smart in business, at least now; yet I've often heard the clerks speak of him very differently, and wonder how our master could place so much confidence in such a swaggering young fellow. Well, I don't understand it, and never grudged it to him when the master invited him to dinner oftener than the others, took him to the springs in summer during the business season, and in winter skated with him or shot at a target in the garden. Three years ago he even took him to London, and last year to Paris, that he might learn to know something of the world, the master said, though Balthazar said so that he could stand gaping about there, which he couldn't do here in Woldom. That's certainly very disrespectful of Balthazar, but you know what people are, and it's surely my duty to conceal nothing on this side. Balthazar was really jealous of Herr Fliederbusch, and the last evening, when my master was going away the next morning to be married, scolded to us in the kitchen because Herr Fliederbusch was packing the master's trunks, and he had done everything himself for the late senator for thirty years. But Herr Fliederbusch packed in this very room, where the master has always slept, though it didn't look so elegant as it does now; and during that time the Herr Doctor was with the master in the master's room, where they are at this moment, and they had probably drunk two or three bottles of wine. Then the doctor went away, and Balthazar lighted him downstairs and didn't come up again, because he sleeps below. I had sent the girls to bed, too, because they were obliged to be up early the next morning, and there was nothing more for them to do or for me; only Balthazar hadn't cleared away the bottles and glasses, and I didn't know whether I should go in, because the master doesn't like it if people come when they're not called; and I probably nodded a little over it, and was very much surprised, when I woke, to find the clock was already striking twelve,

and I thought I had been roused by it, for it was still striking when I waked.

"Well, I'm a sensible old person, and not easily frightened; but when one wakes while the clock is striking twelve, and thinks that everybody has been in bed a long time, and the whole house is as still as death, and suddenly it begins to echo and resound just as it does in church, you know—so hollow and awful that one doesn't know whether the noise comes down from the ceiling above or up from the vaults below. 'Merciful Heavens!' I thought, 'what can that be?' For that my master and Herr Fliederbusch should still be up—no, indeed, that didn't occur to me at first, and it's an everlasting distance to the master's room, and I was down the passage leading from the kitchen past the guest-rooms, where I sleep; and it grew louder, and I summoned up my courage and turned back. Yes, it came from the master's room—first his voice and then Herr Fliederbusch's and then both at the same time, as if they were quarreling fiercely with each other. Well, this was very strange, because I had never yet heard an angry word from the master to Herr Fliederbusch, and would never have thought it possible Herr Fliederbusch would venture to talk so to the master. And out of sheer astonishment—for I know what's seemly for a servant, and a housekeeper ought to set the servants a good example, and listeners never hear any good of themselves; but one needn't listen to hear, and Kabelmann, our beadle, had just gone through the alley and heard it too, though there's no window at all opening upon the alley, and the walls are a yard thick. Well, it may be so, if he swears to it; but the words he can't swear to, I say, for I was standing close by the door and heard nothing I could swear to, except once, when the master cried, 'Give it back to me,' and Herr Fliederbusch replied, 'No, I won't give it back!' And then—God forgive me the sin!—it seemed as if they had each other by the throat, and they probably struck against the table, which upset with all the glasses and bottles on it, and then came a loud shriek. I thought the master had killed him, for it

was Herr Fliederbusch that screamed, and I wanted to go into the room, but the door was locked, and I—you haven't seen—crossed the entry to the dining-room, from which a door leads into the master's room, and this was locked too. But now I became so frightened that I can't describe it, and, besides, everything was perfectly quiet and remained so, and I probably stood for several minutes, always with the light in my hand, and I wonder now that I didn't let it fall in my fright. And then I went into the entry again, and there, thank God! came the master at least, but out of the sleeping-room, and he had a light in his hand, too, and ran towards the stairs as if the house were on fire, and I behind him; for he hadn't seen me at all, so that he was already on the first landing when I still stood at the top, and would have certainly rushed all the way down, only that his candle went out; and he now perceived for the first time that I was there, and called: 'Come quick, Frau Uelzen; come quick!' Well, I came as quick as I could, and he lighted his candle by mine, and was as white as a wall; and his hand shook so that the candlestick struck against mine, and at first he couldn't light the candle at all; and I was obliged to ask three times, 'What has happened?' before he got out: 'Herr Fliederbusch'—only he didn't say Herr Fliederbusch, but Hans—'has thrown himself out of the window in my sleeping-room and is lying in the garden below.' 'Dead?' I asked. 'I don't know,' said my master; 'I called to him, but had no answer.' 'What has happened?' I asked again. 'We've had a quarrel,' said my master. 'I'm very sorry—very. If I could have suspected it!' His lips quivered, his eyes were starting out of his head, and he swayed to and fro till I thought he was falling; then he straightened himself and said: 'This will do no good. Frau Uelzen, stay here and wake Balthazar; I'll look after him myself.' 'But your light will go out again, sir,' said I. 'There's Christian,' replied my master; 'I'll take his lantern.'

"Meantime we had reached the bottom of the stairs, and were passing the windows that look out upon the courtyard. In the courtyard we saw Christian—that's our coachman.

He had already pushed out the chaise, in which my master was going to drive to the station next morning, and, as he heard it begin to rain, had got up again and gone there to spread a cover over it. He's a great simpleton, but always attends carefully to his horses and carriages, and his big lantern was certainly a necessity in the darkness. And it was raining hard when my master opened the door leading into the courtyard, and I said, 'Won't you put on a cap?' but he made no answer, only said Balthazar must run for the doctor immediately. Well, why should I make a long story? for they didn't find him, though they searched the whole garden—first my master alone with Christian, and then a few of our servants, whom the master roused, with half a dozen lanterns; and then they searched the whole house from the upper garret to the lowest cellar, though there was no human possibility that he could have got out of the garden into the house. Then they sent through the whole city, and there was an uproar as if it were all in flames; but Herr Fliederbusch wasn't found, and our master gave the necessary information, and that very night the old chief of police took his deposition—I believe that's what it's called—and said he could go on his journey in peace, for no one could object to giving a young man a box on the ear if he was saucy to his employer; and if the young man, instead of begging pardon, ran away, and out of pure malice, so to speak, threw himself out of a window twenty feet high into the garden, it would serve him right if he broke his neck; and that he didn't do so was plain; and if he had a life like a cat he could climb over a garden-wall; and if cats were not attached to human beings they were to houses, and he'd come back again when he had sown his wild oats; he'd live to see that, and we too. Well, the old gentleman didn't live to see it, for they buried him a week ago, and he was the late senator's best friend and our master's godfather; and I believe he'd turn in his grave if he heard what the people say now about the foolish old story."

"What do they say? What can they say?" cried Annchen. She had suddenly started from her chair and

stretched her clasped hands towards Frau Uelzen. An almost malicious glance flashed from the little housekeeper's swollen eyes at the agitated young wife as she slowly wagged her head from one shoulder to the other.

"What can they say? Ah! what can't wicked people say when they've nothing better to talk about and the matter concerns our master, who has so much property that he could buy the whole city, and gives away his beautiful money so lavishly that it's a sin and a shame to see what creatures often get it? For in this the master is just like the late senator who, when he died, probably had half Woldom in his debtors' account-book—ship captains and sailors and merchants and mechanics—and all canceled and with the words written underneath: 'Payment will be received above.'"

Frau Uelzen wiped her eyes, as she always did when she related this anecdote of the departed.

"Yes, yes," she continued, "he was a good gentleman—too good for this world; and what didn't they say about *him?*—he had been in the slave-trade when he was a young man in America, and still had several dozen ships that sailed between Africa and America, and only carried cargoes of slaves, but never came to Woldom, always anchored behind Gallows Hill—that's half a mile from here—and no one formerly dared to go there, because a few years ago the old gallows still stood, until the Herr Senator tore them down and built a lighthouse. And then they said he only did it because the late king threatened he would order him to be hung on them if he didn't stop the slave-trade and fill up the subterranean passages from the gallows to our house. Yes, one wouldn't believe it, but people really say so; and there are some who declare the passage never was filled up, but is there now; and there is a door, of which nobody knows except the master, leading into his room, which was also occupied by the late senator, who on his death-bed showed it to his son; and if the door could only be found Hans Fliederbusch would be found too."

"Good Heavens!" cried Annchen.

"It's too shameful, isn't it? But don't worry about it. Nobody can understand how Herr Fliederbusch got out of the garden, for there are high, smooth walls all around it, and only one door into the courtyard, where Christian was with the carriage, whom he must have passed, and a few cellar-windows, but they are grated. And it's true about the door in the master's room, and that nobody who doesn't know where it is can easily find it; and there may formerly have been a passage, for in a house that's three hundred years old, and has such thick walls, everything is possible; but now there's only a closet behind it, which, to be sure, is big enough to put half a house in; and one-half is entirely empty; but the other has shelves, where the late senator kept his deeds and other papers, which the young master arranged and packed when the old gentleman died—I was there myself—ten chests full, that now stand in the cellar. And the master kept nothing in it—I know that much—except his fishing-rods and guns, until a few days before he went away he said to me: 'Frau Uelzen, we have the house full of workmen and it will be so for two or three weeks, until everything is finished, and you can't have your eyes everywhere. We'll take the silver from the sideboard and put it in the closet; for, though the men are honest, something might be spoiled which could not be replaced.' 'Yes, indeed,' said I; 'and I think we'll put the spoons and other things in, too. Safe is safe, and I shall be free from anxiety, for anybody can open the drawers in the sideboard with a crooked nail.' The master laughed, but a person like me knows better, and so I packed everything in the closet—in silk paper, as is proper when one has such valuable things in charge—and only kept out half a dozen of our common table and coffee spoons in case of accident; and it was very lucky, for when you wanted the coffee just now, and I told the master I would like to put one of our beautiful gold spoons in the saucer, he told me it would do very well so, and he had lost the key. 'Why didn't you give it to me?' I said; for he was going to give it to me, and I was to take the things out and arrange them on the sideboard again when

everything was in order. And I wonder you haven't noticed how it looks now—like a plucked goose; only the last night the master had his mind so full and didn't go to bed at all, because we expected every minute they would find Herr Fliederbusch somewhere, till it was seven o'clock, and the master was obliged to go to the railway station if he wanted to be with his young bride in Cologne the next morning. But, dear me! there it is striking half-past nine. How time passes when one is talking! I must go to the kitchen, that you may have something fit for supper, for I can't trust Dörthe across the street, though she's been head cook at Mother Ihlefeldt's three years, and the master and Herr Doctor must have finished their talk, if you want to go down now. Can I do anything else for you?"

"Thank you," said Annchen; "I can find my way alone."

"I suppose so," said Frau Uelzen, collecting the coffee service; "if a petted young lady can travel six weeks without even her maid, and the master, well, our master really needs no servant at all; and I've always said, when people wondered: 'So young a couple are happiest when they're entirely alone, and those who have an abundance of everything at home are most unpretending while traveling.'"

Frau Uelzen was already at the door when she made this remark, which she thought particularly complimentary, and in return for which she expected from the young wife a friendly word, or at least a courteous wave of the hand, or even both. But Annchen, who, with her back half turned, was now standing at the end of the room before the large mirror between the two windows, said nothing, and did not even move; but, to make amends, Frau Uelzen, with her sharp eyes, saw very distinctly the young wife's reflection in the mirror, which was brightly illuminated by the candles in the sconces, and it was gazing so mournfully into vacancy with its dark eyes Frau Uelzen thought a few soothing words could do no harm at least; she hemmed, to show that she was still in the room, and said:

"But you mustn't take this to heart. When one has a clear conscience one can let people talk; and our master

isn't like Baron von Klabenow, at Wüstenei, when I was housekeeper there. It's almost forty years ago now, and I was a very young thing, and had to go before the court to say whether I knew anything about it, and what I knew. But I really knew nothing at all, and because a young gentleman comes into the store-room and talks nonsense to a girl, even when he has a beautiful young wife—dear me! Well, old Palzow must have noticed it too, and they probably quarreled about it in Wüstenei Wood; and one day the baron didn't come home, and did not appear for six weeks, though every place was searched—the fields and the woods and the ponds—and old Palzow was always at the head, because nobody had any suspicion of him. And so about this time, in October, Jochen Wenhak's dog barked in the woods—Jochen was the cow-herd, and had driven the cattle under the trees—and had a bone in its mouth. And a cow-herd knows all kinds of bones, and said at once to the gendarme, who was just riding up the highway: 'That's one of our master's bones;' and it was true! He had lain in the pine woods all the time, only a foot under the earth; and they had walked ten times over the very spot without any suspicion; and old Palzow hadn't dared to bury him any deeper, so the foxes had dug up the body and half devoured it. They went at once to arrest the old man, for his powder-horn had been found with other things; but when he saw them coming he shrieked, 'I've been waiting for you a long time,' and sent a bullet through his head, so that he fell dead on the threshold."

Frau Uelzen had related the story, which was one of her favorite tales, loud enough, but was not quite sure whether her mistress had heard, for she still stood before the mirror without moving, and a fear suddenly took possession of the housekeeper that she might, after all, have said too much and talked of things about which she had better kept silence. But she consoled herself with the thought that she had introduced no subject of which she had been expressly forbidden to speak, and had said nothing about the only thing her master had prohibited.

So she coughed lightly, this time in token that she now really intended to go, rattled the china a little, as the cough did not avail, and left the room in the embarrassing uncertainty whether her mistress really did not notice her departure or only pretended not to.

But Annchen, when she heard the door close, passed both hands over her brow and eyes like a person roused from a stupor, glanced timidly around to convince herself that she was really alone, and then rushed to the door through which Frau Uelzen had gone, pushed the bolt, and did the same to the second door that led to the front room.

Then she hurried to the table, on which lay various handbags piled one above another, opened an elegant little box, and with trembling hands rummaged among all sorts of dainty articles of feminine attire. There it was!

She took it out—an article wrapped in a white cambric handkerchief. She unwound it—one of Lebrecht's fine pocket-handkerchiefs; an old-fashioned key, with a long, smooth handle, circular bit, and round top, appeared.

The key was dotted with brown spots; she had already noticed them, and also that the rust had stained the handkerchief.

But as she unfolded the handkerchief and held it to the light—merciful Heavens! was that really rust?

A shudder ran through her frame. She had involuntarily dropped key and handkerchief.

But the next instant she picked them up again, and, looking around her, seemed to be seeking some safe hiding-place, when she perceived the little box.

Were those steps? No; but the key and handkerchief were perhaps safest in her pocket, where she had let them slip in her fright.

From what?

The young wife tried to laugh. The laugh sounded so strange, so unlike her own, that she suddenly burst into tears.

"That horrible person with her frightful stories! And Lebrecht—that he has never said a word to me about it!"

She again sat in the armchair before the fireplace, thinking, thinking as before—no, no! struggling with all the power of her soul against the terrible thought that she had now found the key to Lebrecht's melancholy.

III

"WHAT was that?" asked the doctor.

"I heard a noise," said Lebrecht, closing the door again. "It was only Frau Uelzen."

"'Only Frau Uelzen' is charming," said the doctor, emptying his glass and filling it again—"just like the man with the bad conscience. She was probably coming from your wife."

"I suppose so," said Lebrecht.

"H'm! and suppose she has just told your wife—wholly *en passant* and without thinking anything of it; why should she think much about it?—your pretty secret?"

"I forgot to tell you that I expressly requested her not to speak of it."

"On what pretext?"

"It is—it is to be a surprise for Annchen."

"A surprise is good, very good; and suppose one of the other servants surprises her with it—old Balthazar, for instance?"

"That's as improbable as possible."

"But still possible."

"Why do you torment me?"

"Only to show you that your secret, like the sword of Damocles, in spite of all your precautions, hangs by a silken thread."

"As if I didn't know that just as well and better than you."

"By a silken thread, that any wretched chance can sever, and the sword will fall and—you will be a lost man. Yes, you are already, and I'll prove it to you."

The ironical smile with which the doctor had hitherto

listened to his friend's long confession vanished from his pale face. He began to rub the sharp knees of his long, thin legs with the palms of his hands, at first slowly and then faster and faster, as was his habit when a patient had exhausted his forbearance. Besides, he no longer, as before, looked over his spectacles with a humorous twinkle into his friend's face, but kept his eyes down, as if everything he had to say were writen on the carpet and he must read it in the greatest hurry, for fear the next moment might blot it out.

"I'll prove as plainly as that two and two make four that you're nothing more nor less than a monomaniac, as much as anyone who suffers from an insane idea of persecution or believes that he has a hundred-weight of hay in his stomach or a bushel of caterpillars in his head. For Heaven's sake, imagine how a sensible man in your position would have behaved! There is, apart from his name, about which the schoolboy fought a thousand bloody battles in consequence of teasing and ridicule, in his relations, in his life, a circumstance of which he is ashamed, although in no way to blame for it, and which he can change as little as his name or the nose he brought into the world. In my eyes, to be sure, this shame is contemptible aristocratic nonsense, which already borders on insanity, but is no lunacy, because in this direction I make the widest concessions to taste. What is one man's owl is another man's nightingale, and *vice versa;* and to the man of whom we speak the circumstance in the course of his life has become more and more of an owl. He has alternately raged over it and dreaded it, and even in his way had reason to do so, because other people are just as weak as he, and have occasionally reproached him with his owl; as, for instance, that charming colonel with his: 'We would gladly make you an offer, my dear fellow; but in this aristocratic regiment, you know——' 'Devil take him!' the man said then, and I hoped that on every other occasion, when anyone even pretended to jeer at his owl, he would say, 'Devil take him!'

"He always did so, too, so far as I know, until one fine

day he was obliged to say, 'Devil take *her!*' and that he could not do; he hadn't the heart.

"From my standpoint I must lament this, but I can understand it; nay, more, I'm no moralist, at least not one of those strict ones who allow no exceptions. I allow exceptions; I say love, like war, is a struggle for existence. In war, as in love, all means are fair; and as he would be a poor general who betrayed to the enemy his weak point before the time, so he would be a fool who allowed his lady-love to look into the owl's eyes, when, like the colonel, she would say: 'I would gladly have you for a husband, my dear sir, but in this aristocratic house, you know——'

"*Bon!* The wise general and prudent lover practise concealment. That is their right—nay, more, it is their duty.

"But mark this, *mon cher,* only for a time—only until in battle the moment comes when the battalion the enemy took for an army must break forth and shout, or rather show, we are a handful of men, but each one is a hero—only until those sweet days of satiated, insatiable love, when he can venture to tell her all, all, even if it were that he was a mystic swan knight or incarnate Satan, and she would answer, 'That is all the same to me.'

"I am a physician, my dear fellow, and if I wanted to be indiscreet could cite cases where confessions of scarcely less import have been made and forgiven—nay, what do I say, answered with kisses steeped in tenfold sweetness.

"But you—for I must now speak of you—what are you doing? What have you done? You have allowed those favorable, all-powerful, all-kind, all-loving moments to vanish, never to return.

"Never to return, *mon cher.* You are outside of that paradise where there is no sin and no repentance, no atonement and no punishment—the paradise from which you have just come, and which the young wife inevitably leaves with the first step she takes across the threshold of the house whose mistress she must henceforth be. And she, suddenly feeling on her delicate shoulders the burden of responsibility which she undertook with such careless

courage, asks herself, startled and doubting, 'Will you be able to bear this burden?' And she answers the critical question with a hopeful, confident sigh, 'Yes, if he stands firmly and loyally beside me, he who is the embodiment of loyalty and firmness and honesty and goodness.' And now this good, firm, honest, loyal man comes to her and makes a sneering grimace, 'You are snared, my sweet little bird;' or, what in my eyes is ten times worse, he whispers in her ear, amid caresses that cannot come from his anxious heart, 'I have sinned against you and am not worthy.' Pshaw! can the excellent husband marvel if she takes him at his word? I tell you, *mon cher,* I know young ladies who would do so; and, from all you have told me earlier or later about your wife, I should say that she will do so. One isn't descended on the mother's side from the Klüngel-Pütz for nothing.

"For here, my dear fellow, the circle from which there was an escape at first closes. From fear of the aristocratic nonsense of the family you have kept your secret until you can no longer disclose it without not only offending the aristocratic whims for which I should care nothing, but morality itself—morality, *mon cher,* whose sacredness I, too, respect.

"Think of the poet's words: 'He who murders confidence destroys the coming generation in its mother's womb.' The wound you have dealt your young wife's trusting heart will never wholly heal. From this hour to all eternity, she will, she can, never believe your words until she has obtained confirmation of them elsewhere. Do you know what that means to a young wife—from elsewhere? It simply means from other men, who are probably no better and no worse than you, but whom she, out of pure opposition to you, unceremoniously believes better. I'll show you by an example close at hand how far this want of confidence can go.

"You say Frau Uelzen won't disclose the secret to her because you have forbidden it. Let us suppose she resists the temptation that lies in the very command and doesn't chatter. Who in the world will answer for it that she

doesn't make use of the precious time to tell your wife the story of Hans Fliederbusch—I repeat, in spite of your muttering, who will answer for it?—and tell the story with the ghastly comments, as it has been in people's mouths almost ever since you went away? I haven't told you the most horrible yet, because I wanted to spare you; but *quod ferrum non sanat, ignis!* So the old, half-forgotten legend of the secret passage that opens into this room and at the other end into a cave on the seashore near Gallows Hill has been dug up again, and people now know exactly where the young man is. It's very ridiculous, isn't it? And yet it's not ridiculous at all. You can't let everybody come here and say: 'Look, gentlemen, at this great closet; it would probably hold all you fools together.' And even if you care nothing about the fools' gossip, suppose the talk gets to your wife's ears, and the youngster doesn't return—which may God forbid!—and the secret of his disappearance should never be explained, do you think all this would contribute to make your young wife's stay in this confounded castle very comfortable? Do you suppose she could ever enter this room without thinking of the story? Or, I'll tell you what, my dear fellow, if I were in your place, before she heard anything of the gossip and the existence of the closet I'd secretly have it walled up, so that when the cackle is really carried to her you can say quietly: 'Now think what nonsense, my dear! There isn't even a closet here, let alone a secret closet, let alone a secret passage, let alone——' Are you crazy?"

The doctor, whose thin body had accompanied the long speech, finally poured forth in almost frantic haste, with more and more energetic, pendulum-like motions, while the hands that rubbed his knees looked like trembling reflections of light, sat as if petrified, his eyes fixed on Lebrecht with a half-startled, half-questioning gaze, as a physician looks in whose presence some one suddenly displays extremely suspicious symptoms of insanity; for Lebrecht, who, as the doctor at least supposed, sat opposite to him listening quietly, had started up, raised the heavy armchair, which the doctor

could only move with difficulty from one place to another, high in the air as if it were a child's, and then dashed it down again, so that, in spite of the thick carpet, there was a loud bang that made the glasses and bottles on the large oak table rattle and the lamp with three burners hanging over it swing perceptibly. Then he rushed up and down the room, thrusting both hands in his fair, curly hair and shaking his clenched fists, as if in the face of an invisible rival, and now paused close before the doctor and muttered through his teeth:

"Damn it! Damn it!"

"Damn what or who, my dear Lebrecht?" said the doctor, in a tone whose calmness formed the strangest contrast to the torrent of speech he had just poured forth.

"We put it there—there in the closet!"

"What, my dear Lebrecht?"

"How can you ask? The—the——"

"The *corpus delicti?*"

"Yes, yes; we were obliged to put it somewhere. It was the nearest, the safest hiding-place for the moment."

"Of course! I had entirely forgotten to ask where you had left it."

"He was to take it out again and restore it to its place, in case I could write to him that I had spoken to Annchen, or else put it secretly somewhere in safety in one of the garrets; for it ought not to be destroyed at any cost."

"Of course—the ancient sign of the house! We still possess so much reverence."

"I had left the key with him for the purpose."

"And he has taken it?"

"No; it was about the key that matters went so far. He threatened to betray me; I wanted it back again; he wouldn't return it. I snatched the accursed key; I—I struck him with it."

"Dead?"

"Are you mad?"

"No matter; you needn't stamp your foot. So he wasn't dead? And then?"

"Then came everything as I have told you. I——"

"Well?"

"I've lost the key!"

"Where and how?"

"I don't know; I thought I threw it, wrapped up, into one of my trunks. On the journey I repeatedly searched for it in vain; it's gone."

"Take it for a good omen," cried the doctor, starting up —"take it as a sign that you must never open the closet again, or, as I just said, have an extra wall built over it immediately, and as, according to the words and meaning of your father's will, you must have one, let it be a new one. *Le roi est mort,* and, as behooves so great a tyrant, solemnly interred in the vaults of his own palace. *Requiescat in pace,* and *vive le roi!*"

"It won't do! it won't do! The closet must be opened again; I had put in all my silver that very morning."

"Does anybody know?"

"Frau Uelzen."

"H'm! Does she know the key is gone?"

"I was obliged to tell her—just now; she wanted to get something. I knew it would be so, and therefore wished to avoid the reception of my young clerks, whom I should have been compelled to entertain, and then——"

"And you are afraid to have the closet opened in other people's presence, and especially by other people. The *corpus delicti*——"

"Stands tall and broad in front."

"Then you must do it alone!"

"That will be very difficult without the confounded key, as there is no other."

"Then burst the door. Or are you afraid the noise will wake your wife? Pshaw! healthy young women generally sleep sound."

"Cease your jests."

"By Heavens! I'm not jesting. What are you doing, what have you done all this time, except trust to your wife's sound sleep that she hears nothing, sees nothing, gives no

thought to the altered, insufferable manner of which you accuse yourself—that no incautious word of your servants will afford an explanation of your melancholy that would make her tender skin creep so that no kisses and no caresses could ever wholly soothe her again? Why do you stand there, man, as if thunderstruck? You, the King of Woldom, every inch a boy, that is afraid of the ghosts he himself conjured up! Can nothing, neither my jests, my earnestness, my sound reasons, the malicious chance that seems to have conspired against you—and there is a chance, believe me, in spite of Wallenstein—respect for yourself, love for your wife—can nothing, nothing at all, induce you to do the sole and only thing that remains for you to do; to go at once, before your wife can cross this threshold, and tell her all—weeping or swearing, humbly or angrily, it's all the same to me, and a matter of no consequence—but all, do you hear? all, all—down to the dot over the 'i'!"

"For God's sake, hush!"

The doctor, who in the fire of his zeal had spoken the last imploring words as loud as his hasty manner and hoarse voice permitted, had pointed with outstretched arm towards the door that led into the entry, and through which he expected Annchen's entrance. But the eyes of Lebrecht, who stood opposite to him, were fixed upon a second one, through which the first room of the suite was reached, and to his extreme discomfort he had suddenly seen that this door, which he had just carefully closed himself, was only ajar. Perhaps it had sprung open when he banged the heavy chair so violently on the floor; no matter, it must be shut again, and he was just in the act of rushing past the doctor, whom he scarcely heard, when a chair before it was moved. His startled exclamation and staring eyes now made the doctor turn too. The door, already ajar, was wide open, and against the light background of the apartments, illumined with candles, stood Annchen's tall, slender figure. She hesitated a moment, and then, with a light, floating movement, a smile on her beautiful, though somewhat pallid face, advanced towards the gentlemen.

IV

The suddenness of Annchen's appearance had for a few moments completely robbed of their composure the two men surprised in so strange a conversation.

Lebrecht, presenting the doctor, could scarcely mutter something about his "oldest and best friend," and the doctor gurgle: "How do you do, fair lady? Welcome to Woldom!" in his most unintelligible throat-notes. He then made a terribly solemn bow, and, after straightening his tall, thin figure, gazed down from his height through his glittering spectacles at Annchen, while the latter, in a few cordial words, answered his greeting and sat down in one of the armchairs which Lebrecht, in embarrassed haste, pushed up to the fireside, inviting his friend to be seated. But the doctor muttered something unintelligible through his teeth and began to pace up and down with long strides, as was his habit when in his practice an unforeseen moment met him, concerning which he wished to decide without troubling himself about the patient or others present.

He had not foreseen, could not have foreseen this. From Lebrecht's scanty description, he had imagined Annchen to be a little, pretty, vivacious person, with a quantity of fluttering ribbons, always ready for jests, laughter, and all sorts of pranks and mischief; a little, or even very, coquettish, and, all in all, terribly pampered and spoiled but yet, in spite, or precisely on account of these qualities, the right wife for his somewhat too grave friend, who was now and then pensive to melancholy, formal to pedantry. And he had constantly seen this airy little figure before his mind's eye during the whole singular conversation he had just had with his friend, and which had made him so beside himself. The darling of his soul, his idol—nay, his ideal, much as he found to criticise and reprove—the handsome, proud man, the King of Woldom, in a situation of such horrible absurdity that if, instead, he had really killed and cooked and eaten Hans Fliederbusch it would have seemed to him,

Dr. Adalbert Bertram, the more pardonable case, and all for the sake of the airy little figure, the little person who doubtless scarcely reached to the blond giant's heart, whom the giant could take up on his arms like a doll, and, with "Eiapopaia, what is rustling in the straw?" laughingly sing the ridiculous secret into the little doll's ears! Was the doll getting angry? Hush, little doll, hush! or you won't have your piece of sugar to-night. And the doll is quiet, and—there is no longer a rustling in the straw.

Then he turns, and before him stands a young lady, in each and every particular a complete contrast to the picture of his over-hasty imagination—an elastic figure, that only requires to raise the beautiful head a very little to touch the giant Lebrecht's lips. And what a head!—small and dainty as the Diana of Versailles, with superb contours, the blue-black, slightly-waving hair sweeping above the broad, yet delicate forehead, and gathered with careless grace into a knot at the back of the head; large, flashing eyes under beautifully-arched, delicate eyebrows; a small mouth, with soft, yet firm lips, that one is uncertain whether one can best kiss or command; everything about the beautiful, slender figure looking as if it had been cast in a mould, and every pose, every slightest gesture of the hand, like that of a gracious queen, even the tone of the voice, soft and low, like the drapery that floats about a divinity. The doctor was like a person who has received a divine revelation.

A divine, terrible revelation!

He had suddenly understood all that a few minutes before had been an intricate rebus, which possibly has a very profound, but, according to all probability, extremely tasteless interpretation. The strange problem was solved, to the shame, and at the same time the deepest alarm, of the counselor. Lebrecht's original thought, which had seemed to him cowardice and absurdity, suddenly appeared like great boldness; Lebrecht's delay in making the disclosure at least perfectly intelligible; his present situation not in the least laughable, but in the highest degree critical, nay, almost desperate; a frankness such as he had just imagined and

advised as a matter of course only possible to the boldest courage, and extremely doubtful of success; preparation very wise, perhaps necessary, the more so as here there could be no question of submissive, easily-intimidated, all-forgiving love. One so beautiful had unquestionably found it easy to be loved; why take the trouble to love in return? Did a young, loving wife look so? Did a young, loving wife talk so—so politely and formally, sensibly and calmly —on her first evening in the house of her beloved husband, at the first interview with her husband's best friend. For he had long since given up the idea that, as he had feared at her entrance, she had heard something of their conversation, even if only enough to make her perplexed and confused. There was no trace of embarrassment—the air of a princess who is not wholly satisfied with her reception, the arrangements made, but is far too aristocratic to allow it to be noticed. Perhaps it did not suit her ladyship that he was still here, after she had delayed her coming long enough and given him time to go. Out of this room? Do you know, madam, that I, Dr. Adalbert Bertram, have a right to this room which you must yet gain? Do you know that your husband, who now bears you company so silently and sullenly beside the fire, and I, Dr. Adalbert Bertram, have sat together yonder beside that dear old massive table of solid oak for years, evening after evening, until late at night, drinking, chatting, smoking, exchanging thoughts and feelings, even if we were silent, even if we did not vie with each other in mad jests, or restore the confused world to order in long speeches overflowing with wisdom? And now do you come and make the boldest man a coward, separate the most faithful friends, like a beautiful ghost, till I, Dr. Adalbert Bertram, who do not fear the devil himself, scarcely dare step on this, my well-worn soil, this confounded thick carpet, that is merely put down on your account, and no longer venture to pour out a glass of wine, though, from so much talking and the nervous excitement I feel through my whole body, my tongue cleaves to the roof of my mouth? Well, by Heaven! you shall not catch me in your net, fair

fiend, nor yonder poor fellow either, or you shall release him again, so sure as my name is Dr. Adalbert Bertram!

And the doctor approached the table, filled his glass to the brim, emptied it at a single draught, and continued his walk, cursing his nerves—his nerves that were utterly rebellious to-day; secretly quarreling with Lebrecht, whose cowardice was undoubtedly contagious; cursing the young wife's beauty, in which he no longer saw the cause of the situation, but the real motive and root of the evil.

The tall, thin man, who, revolving so many dangerous and critical matters in his mind, scarcely found time to occasionally mingle in the scanty conversation with an abrupt, almost unintelligible word, spoken, moreover, in a strangely scornful tone, would probably have made a perplexing—nay, unpleasant impression upon anyone who saw him for the first time. To poor Annchen, saddened and agitated by the most sorrowful forebodings, the most terrible fears, he seemed horrible, although she summoned up all her strength to conceal her real feelings. This was much worse than she had feared, and she had dreaded the doctor, and often, half in jest and half in earnest, called him her beloved Lebrecht's Mephistopheles and evil genius. Was he, who, according to Lebrecht's declaration, could detect the most secret thoughts in people's minds, now reading her soul, while, wherever he walked and stood, he kept the spectacles that glittered like coals in the firelight fixed steadily upon her? Was he enjoying her terror, which assumed more and more tangible form, ever increasing when her timid glance wandered to Lebrecht, from whose handsome face the quiet serenity that formerly so bewitched her had vanished forever —nay, who, as he sat there gazing so silently into the coals, seemed to have aged ten years, scarcely to be her beloved, adored Lebrecht?

But, to be sure, Lebrecht doubted himself—nay, was almost in despair. Bertram really need not have used so many words or been so pathetic to show him that he had committed an act of folly and cowardice; that, if he were no brainless, heartless creature, he must at least speak now;

that every moment he suffered to elapse aggravated his horrible situation. Yes, yes, yes! he was determined to speak; he repeated again and again the words he wanted to say, and then hoped these words would suddenly utter themselves, and shrank from the terror he would feel if they did. In Bertram's presence? It was impossible! He would do it the moment Bertram was out of the door. Why didn't he go? Why was he rushing about with his long legs between husband and wife, who had the most important things to tell each other, and with his diabolical gestures and looks secretly challenging him to do his duty? He would do his duty, but not under Bertram's spectacles. And then he thought how he had anticipated the moment in which he should make his friend and his wife, the two dearest beings he had on earth, acquainted with each other, and this dull, embarrassed, torturing interview was that ardently-desired moment!

"Have you no more patients to visit this evening, Adalbert?" he asked.

The doctor stopped, looked over his spectacles at his friend with a scornful smile, as if he wanted to say, "You haven't the courage yet, *mon cher,*" and silently continued his walk.

"I had hoped the doctor would take supper with us to-night," said Annchen.

Bertram bowed, at the same time slightly shrugging his narrow shoulders, so that it might have meant equally well, "I thank you," or, "I am very sorry, madam!"

"To be sure, there will still be a slight delay," Annchen continued, hesitatingly. "Frau Uelzen says she can't have it ready before ten o'clock, at which hour she expected us; it now——"

"Lacks five minutes of being a quarter past eight," said the doctor, first glancing hastily at the clock, and then gazing fixedly at Lebrecht; "but it occurs to me that if you really want me to stay here, madam, I must excuse myself for a short time—the shortest possible time, Lebrecht."

"So you must go to your patients?" said Annchen.

"Heaven forbid!" replied the doctor; "perfectly healthy young fellows, clerks from the counting-house. They were to meet at a quarter past eight at Mother Ihefeldt's—our great restaurant, madam—to rehearse once more an octette they have been practicing—the words by myself—mellow with a glass or two—throats somewhat hoarse by respect and expectation. They won't leave the place until I go for them, and, as a compassionate man, which I am, I wouldn't like to leave them sitting there all night. So excuse me for five or ten minutes, and—*a rivederci!*"

The doctor approached the side-table, on which, at his entrance, he had laid his hat and cane. Lebrecht, who had just ardently wished him away, felt a chill run through his veins. If Bertram went, the moment was there; the secret that oppressed his breast and closed his throat must be spoken. Could not the chalice still remain undrained for a time—only a little respite, the few miserable hours that would be left to him if Bertram stayed?

"Why should you trouble yourself?" said he. "Nebelow would attend to it just as well."

"He could probably attend to it, but not so well," said the doctor, stretching out his hand towards his hat.

"Poor young fellows!" said Annchen, "they have undoubtedly been anticipating it. It's too bad that we have deprived them of the pleasure, and ourselves."

"If it will afford you pleasure, madam," said the doctor hastily, "they will come at any moment."

Lebrecht trembled. Bertram evidently did not trust him, and this was nothing but a trick to bring about the situation which would undoubtedly cause the discovery, and which he had therefore avoided with so much care—to thus indirectly force him to an explanation, that must of course be made before the young men came. He would not allow himself to be forced, and would not be a plaything in Bertram's hands.

"Pardon me, my friend," he said, "if I enter a protest and send Nebelow to positively decline the attention. It is very painful to me to have spoiled the young fellows' sport,

but I don't see how the matter could be improved in this way. Such a thing only has meaning, it is only pleasant, when done at the right moment."

Lebrecht had risen and touched the knob of the bell, pushing aside, with a pressure of his strong arm, Bertram, who was already standing at the door.

"So you will not?" said the doctor in a low tone, and then, turning to Annchen, added aloud: "At the right moment! That is certainly the principal thing; woe to those who lose the right moment."

"But it is now lost again!" cried Lebrecht, throwing himself lazily into his chair.

"Every moment can be made the right one—nay, will only become so by being seized," said the doctor with a scornful smile. "To be sure, the right moment requires the right man."

"Perhaps I'm not the right man."

"At least not at this moment."

"In none in your eyes! Pray, speak out; I'm accustomed of old to such friendly criticisms from your mouth."

"Then they ought at least no longer to surprise you, as they appear to do," said the doctor. "I have the honor, madam——"

"Stay!" cried Annchen.

She had started up and taken a few hasty steps towards the doctor. "You must not inflict this sorrow on me. It is the first time I see you with my Lebrecht, and would you part from him in anger? Must I suppose that I am the cause of a quarrel between two such old friends? I——"

A feverish flush suffused her cheeks. She passed her hand over her brow and eyes, and in a quieter tone, with a smile upon her lips, with which her fixed, anxious eyes did not exactly harmonize, continued:

"No, no, dear Herr Doctor! you must stay. Lebrecht is right, too; there will not be a pure tone to-night. And then"—she had turned towards the table and was smoothing the cover, which the doctor had pushed aside in his moving to and fro,—"and then I should really be embar-

rassed by so many visitors, whom I ought not to send away without entertaining. Frau Uelzen would probably do her duty, and there is no lack of wine, but an entire, almost entire, deficiency of silver. So—so at least Frau Uelzen said, and that my usually careful Lebrecht——"

She was still standing at the table, turning her back to the two men. During her last words the doctor had placed himself opposite to Lebrecht and was glaring down at him through his spectacles, while the latter answered the mute invitation with a defiant smile and, interrupting Annchen with a calmness that enraged Bertram, said:

"Has lost the key of the closet. That is perfectly correct; and also that it would be very troublesome to open the door; Annchen knows that, and—enough of the matter! Isn't that so, Annchen?"

"Certainly, certainly!" said Annchen; "just as you please."

"Certainly, just as he pleases!" cried the doctor. "Polygarchy is objectionable. One must be master! An excellent motto! a jovial motto! Ah! that old rogue of a Homer! —that ironical rogue."

The doctor seemed to have entirely forgotten that he had just intended to go, as well as Lebrecht that he had rung for the servant. They again sat around the fireside as before, only no one spoke a word, and no one seemed to notice the long pause which yet oppressed all like a burden.

A terrible burden to poor Annchen. It seemed as if an eternity had elapsed since, summoning up all her courage, she had entered through yonder door; and yet scarcely half an hour had passed. How should she bear it? An eager longing welled up hotly in her heart. "Lebrecht! dear Lebrecht! tell me! Now, now! humbly or angrily—it's just the same —but all, all, all!" And again the cry already on her lips crept back to her dully-throbbing heart. It had happened here, here! within these thick walls, that seemed as if they must stifle the angriest shout, the loudest shriek, and yet had not stifled them to the listener at the door. Through that second door he had fled, the angry man behind him—

through the salon—through all the rooms, the magnificent rooms, gleaming with gold and silk, through which she had first walked in the half-dusk and just now in the dazzling light of the lamps and candles—the sleeping-room—to the window!

A long-drawn, wailing sound, as if from some huge trumpet out of tune, suddenly roused her from her terrible fancies.

"Merciful Heavens! what's that?"

"An old acquaintance of ours," said the doctor—"Capellmeister Northeast. He always toots first in the narrow Rathmus alley, to try whether he's in the right tune; then the whole orchestra joins in. There it goes already! Isn't it magnificent music, madam? and costs nothing."

"Except at the utmost a few window-panes or ships," said Lebrecht, making a violent effort to join in the conversation.

"Apropos of old acquaintances," continued the doctor, heeding Lebrecht as little as if he were sitting alone with Annchen by the fireside, "do you know, madam, that you'll meet an old acquaintance here? At least I may be permitted to infer so from the man's hints and the very unusual interest he seems to take in you and your husband."

"An acquaintance, and an old one, and here in Woldom! How is that possible?"

The doctor was not perfectly sure that the young wife knew what she was saying; her large dark eyes looked fixed, as if her thoughts were elsewhere; but he was not talking for her, but Lebrecht, although he seemed not to notice him.

"How is it possible? You must thank the great sower called the Government, who scatters the priceless seeds of his treasured intelligence over all countries, even our dreary sand-downs, on which, to be sure, usually such costly plants do not thrive."

"You make me curious," said Annchen, with the same fixed, vacant stare.

"Certainly not so curious as the man—I don't know whether by nature or profession—is. Lawrence Sterne—one of my saints, madam—would have numbered him among

the most inquisitive travelers, in possession of a ticket that gives him a legal right to all family mysteries and secrets within a circuit of ten miles for the space of six weeks. The commission he holds here as chief of police *ad interim* lasts no longer; then he goes to the Ministry in Berlin, where there is a larger field for such talents. Meantime, as I said, he hasn't been idle. He knows everything. I'll venture to say he knows we're sitting here together and of whom we are talking."

"If we only knew of whom *you* were talking!" said Lebrecht.

"He's very enthusiastic about you both," said the doctor, still addressing Annchen; "he calls it the greatest sorrow of his life that he was obliged to leave Cologne a week before your wedding, and thus was prevented from glorifying the entertainment by his presence and poetry, in which latter field, to judge from his own statements, he is superior to Goethe and Schiller."

"So it's one of your many adorers, Annchen," said Lebrecht.

The doctor was vexed at the sneering tone in which Lebrecht had made the remark, that seemed to have deeply wounded Annchen. She had suddenly started up in her chair, then sank back in it again as quickly as the burning blush had appeared and vanished in her cheeks.

"Undoubtedly," said he; "it is the privilege of the sun to be worshiped by many—by the just and unjust, giants and pygmies."

"Of course, the little humpbacked assessor," said Lebrecht—"Frank, or whatever the repulsive fellow is called."

"Von Frank—Oscar von Frank," said the doctor. "The description agrees, except the repulsiveness, which is a matter of taste. Do you, too, think him so repulsive, madam?"

"He has been intimate in my parents' house for years," said Annchen.

"He boasts of it," said the doctor, "and his regret that

he can only continue the pleasant custom in your home so short a time is, therefore, all the deeper."

"I think he won't continue it at all," said Lebrecht. "I hate the man."

"Could that, perhaps, be mutual?"

The doctor suddenly dropped the satirical tone in which he had hitherto spoken and turned to Lebrecht.

"In all seriousness, *mon cher,* I believe it is the case, and that the very unusual activity which the gentleman in question has developed in a certain affair from the first moment of his presence here—we were just talking of the matter when you came in, madam; Lebrecht will probably tell you about it—by no means has its source in friendly sympathy and kind desire to aid, as he pretends, but, on the contrary, flows from the very impure spring of a deep, but not sufficiently concealed, hatred. At least, the man's behavior made this impression upon me. I wanted to tell you so, and warn you to use caution towards the smooth hypocrite, but, to my satisfaction, I perceive that the warning would be unnecessary. What is the matter, madam?"

The eager doctor had noticed as little as Lebrecht, whose blood buzzed in his ears at this abrupt mention of the odious story, that Annchen sat, deadly pale and almost fainting, pressing her hand upon her heart, and the two men were equally startled by her convulsive sobbing.

They sprang from their seats, but Annchen had also already risen, smiling, and by a wave of the hand beseeching her astonished companions not to be alarmed.

"Pardon me," she said; "it's nothing, really nothing—at most the fatigue of the journey. No, you mustn't go, doctor; on the contrary, you see I am making as much haste as possible to belong to the list of your patients. Only such attacks, thank Heaven! don't last long with me—only a moment, I assure you. Certainly, dear Lebrecht, it's already over—entirely over. I believe I only want something to eat. We are fasting, my dear doctor, and you're certainly hungry, too. I'll look after the supper; you needn't be afraid, Lebrecht, that I shall interfere with your Frau

Uelzen; she shall reign undisturbed, at least this evening. Are you laughing, doctor? I'm really not quarrelsome, like some people."

She held out one hand to the doctor, who, bending his tall figure very low, pressed it to his lips.

"You are a glorious woman," said he. "I must make this confession, even if the jealous Lebrecht should forbid me the house for it, like the unfortunate chief of police."

"You would talk the blue out of the sky to-day," said Lebrecht, forcing a smile, and then added angrily to the servant, who had just entered:

"Where have you been? I rang for you half an hour ago. You must—what have you there?"

"Just delivered," said the old man in his hollow voice, holding out a telegram to his master with a trembling hand.

"Well, then, give it to me!" cried Lebrecht impatiently.

He had approached the table and scrawled his name below the receipt. "Here! and come back again at once, do you hear?"

"The old man is drunk again to-day," said Lebrecht, opening the dispatch. "I shall be obliged to send him away, sorry——"

"What has happened?" cried Annchen.

She had noticed how Lebrecht, after scarcely a glance at the sheet, changed color. He did not answer immediately.

"For Heaven's sake!" cried Annchen, "tell me. Mamma is sick, or papa——"

"What! Sick! They are coming—this evening."

Annchen uttered a cry of joy, hastily seizing the paper Lebrecht had dropped on the table and reading the contents aloud, as if her ears must come to the aid of her tear-dimmed eyes.

"'Mamma half dead with longing to see you; hoped to meet you to-day in Berlin. Coming by express train. Please send carriage to station for mamma. Have king's bowl ready for me; will brew the drink myself. Bring Lisette with us.' (That's my maid, doctor.)

"'Your Old Papa.'"

"Oh! how happy I am. Oh! how happy I am."

She kissed the sheet again and again amid streaming tears.

"I believe you, madam—I believe you," said the doctor, with a reminiscence of the favorite character of his favorite author; and then, in true Bräsig style, added in a low tone to Lebrecht, who with frowning brow was standing beside the great table as if rooted to the earth: "Keep your nose in sight. Will you speak now?"

Annchen had not understood the words, but, low and quickly as the doctor had spoken, caught the whisper. The black veil was again about to fall over her joy; she threw it resolutely back.

"Now, quick! quick!" she cried. "You must excuse Lebrecht. And me—I'll go with him. No, that won't do; it will be better after all if—if—— What was I going to say?"

The doctor, with a sympathizing face, watched the young wife, who now seemed to him doubly beautiful, and in her joyful excitement evidently scarcely knew what she was saying.

"Perhaps you were going to say whether it would not be better if I brought your parents from the station?"

Annchen and Lebrecht looked at him at the same time, Annchen surprised, Lebrecht startled.

"They can't escape me," continued the doctor quietly; "the night train is never crowded, and even a less practiced eye would instantly discover such distinguished persons. Lebrecht and you could then quietly make your preparations together."

"How kind you are!" said Annchen again, holding out her hand to the doctor.

"On no account!" cried Lebrecht.

"Why on no account?" asked the doctor, over his shoulder.

"What would our parents think? Impossible! And what preparations should I have to make?"

"Are your parents-in-law to eat with tin spoons?" said the doctor, releasing Annchen's hand and stepping between her and Lebrecht, so that the former saw nothing of the half-scornful, half-threatening grimace he made the latter, and which Lebrecht answered with a more defiant than embarrassed look and the sullen words:

"It will do so——"

"Said the pitcher till it broke!" cried the doctor vehemently. "What do you say, madam?"

"It will do," said the latter very gently. "In case of necessity we might in the neighborhood——"

"Very seemly for the king of Woldom!" growled the doctor.

"I say, only in case of necessity; but, dear Lebrecht, papa and you—you have so often spoken of the old silver bowl, and that your first drink should be out of it, and papa expressly requested—if it were possible——"

"Here no resistance avails," sang the doctor in horribly false notes.

Lebrecht felt like a hunted stag that no longer sees any way of escape, and therefore resolves to fight. He would run the risk and see whether Bertram would venture.

"There is no question of resistance," he said, "but a simple impossibility. The bowl is, of course, in the closet, too."

"Which is in that wall," replied the doctor. "Send for Peter Hinrich; he'll open any lock for you in five minutes."

"Except this; I know it."

"In plain German, you won't give your father-in-law this little pleasure."

"If I could."

"Man can do what he wishes."

"Well, then, I won't!"

"You ought to have said so at once."

"What kind of a key was it?" said Annchen.

"Dear me! I've already told you," exclaimed Lebrecht. "A large, old-fashioned, very oddly-shaped key of the fifteenth or even fourteenth century, such as no longer exists

or can be procured. I even remember that years ago old Hinrich once worried for hours at that lock."

"Then go," said Annchen, "or my poor parents will find no one at all at the station."

"There's plenty of time yet," observed the doctor—"a little after nine—a full hour. We can drive there in ten minutes."

"And the horses must be harnessed," said Lebrecht; "besides, we want a second carriage for the baggage. I'll bring ours at the same time, Annchen. Is there anything else?"

"No, thank you," said Annchen.

The tone cut Lebrecht to the heart. She surely did not suspect why he refused so simple a request, and that he would have given one of his hands if he had not been compelled to deny her wish and everything were already told. But surely it was not yet too late. Bertram was going; he himself could then, under some pretext, remain or return before he drove away. Perhaps it could best be said in a pinch.

"Will you go with me, Bertram? Nebelow doesn't come back; perhaps the message is incorrectly delivered. There will be a misunderstanding."

"Certainly," said the doctor; "anything except misunderstandings. I have the honor, madam——"

The two men moved toward the door.

"Doctor!"

Bertram turned. "At your service."

"I wanted to ask you something—about mamma, dear Lebrecht; ladies' affairs; nothing that will interest you, Lebrecht; mamma's old trouble. I know she'll begin about it this very evening and never forgive me for not having at least prepared our friend for such an important matter. Could you stay a few minutes, doctor?"

Lebrecht ground his teeth. So it was not to be.

"I won't interrupt you then," said he. "*Au revoir.*"

He was out of the door, which he closed behind him.

The doctor had his hat and cane in his hand. He was

furious with Lebrecht and furious with Annchen, who, in the usual feminine fashion, without the slightest suspicion of what she was doing, thought she might chatter away in nonsense moments on which life and death depended. He was just going out of the door with a "Sorry, madam; another time," when the young wife, who had stood as if listening, rushed up to him, and, putting her hand on his arm, exclaimed in anxious tones, "Don't go! Don't go! I must speak to you!"

"Ah!" said the doctor, "you must speak to me. That's quite a different matter. Pray sit down again, madam. What is it?"

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However, the doctor did not seem at all curious to learn the matter in question. It was not about the mamma; so much was plain. So Frau Uelzen had told the secret. Lebrecht had not feared in vain, had not exaggerated; she was indignant at the affront offered to her distinguished ancestors on the mother's side under her eyes, as it were, of a von Klüngel-Pütz, whom a strange chance was now bringing to be present at her daughter's disgrace. Even the sudden appearance of an old acquaintance—a friend who had been intimate in the family for years—seemed to have greatly startled her. Of course, it was one witness the more of the cruel injury. And now she was going to open her heart, so filled with shame and sorrow, to the friend, since she dared not to the husband—perhaps did not even think it worth while to show her scorn to the man she despised. During the whole preceding scene she had been a pattern of matrimonial coolness and reserve. But she need only quarrel with Dr. Adalbert Bertram. He understood how to drive out devils; among others, even the devil of arrogance. She need only come to him.

While the doctor, with each long stride that he took up and down the room, plunged deeper and deeper into the error which friendly zeal and a firm belief in the infallibility

of his powers of observation had lured him, poor Annchen had long since lost the desperate courage with which she had detained him. What had she done? What did she want? Confess to this gloomy, disagreeable man the tortures she had suffered ever since she entered this house, in constantly increasing proportions, until her heart could no longer contain her terror? The horrible dread of a horrible thing, which she dared not think, which she did not think—no, no! with which she struggled as a sleeper struggles with the nightmare that oppresses him. It was surely only a horrible dream, from which she would awake if she could only once cry out, call for help. Help! Help!

But the cry did not cross her quivering lips; instead of that, somebody said—it must be herself, only that the voice seemed like a stranger's, and appeared to come from the end of the room:

"It isn't on my mother's account; it's about Lebrecht, who is so—strange, so—out of humor—of late—and this evening—on the long journey—and now here—just now. My parents—my kind old father—he has always been so fond of him, so very fond; they have so often joked about it—why—why——"

The strange voice was silenced by a sob; but the sob came from her own breast, and these were her tears which trickled through her fingers, which, sinking into a chair, she pressed upon her burning eyes.

The doctor looked at the drooping figure in astonishment. Did she really know nothing? That twice repeated, tremulous "Why" really did not sound like a person who knew, far less like an angry one. Was the beautiful young lady only nervous from the journey, annoyed, alarmed by her Lebrecht's strange conduct? Did she only desire an explanation, which Frau Uelzen had not given, which he——

But he, who apparently had just erred so greatly, wanted firmer ground this time, so he said:

"Why Lebrecht did not grant you the apparently trifling favor about the bowl—do you want to know that, madam?"

She nodded. "Yes, yes; that too."

"That too! So there's something else?"

"No, no!" said the anxious Annchen, convulsively clasping her fingers and gazing up at the doctor with fixed, staring eyes.

Should he tell her? The opportunity was favorable. She seemed gentle, agitated; perhaps feared that Lebrecht would vent upon her parents the ill-humor so unintelligible to her; that her parents, to their surprise and terror, would find the new marriage already shadowed by mysterious clouds; and he could say, "That is it; and now rush to your Lebrecht, when he returns, and whisper in his ear, with a kiss, 'I know all,' and you'll see how, in the twinkling of an eye, he'll be the old Lebrecht again."

No, he could not say it. Lebrecht had snared himself in this net like a clumsy lion; he must also have the power to rend the bonds—ought to owe his deliverance to no helpful mouse. That would be a bad service he would render him. Love forgives much, but will not pardon cowardice; and this, which unfortunately bordered upon, or was already, cowardice, would remain so in the eyes of this beautiful, aristocratic lady if he deprived Lebrecht of the chance of trampling the loathsome worm with his own feet.

But he could do this: show her the loathsome worm as it appeared to Lebrecht's eyes—a horrible dragon. He could try to place her at Lebrecht's point of view, inspire her with the necessary respect for the monster. This he could do, and—he would.

He again laid his hat and cane on the table, sat down in one of the low armchairs opposite Annchen, and, slowly rubbing his sharp knees with the palms of his hands and fixing his glittering spectacles upon the anxious wife, said,

"I don't know whether from reading English—Tauchnitz's edition, madam—you are familiar with an expression which not rarely occurs, especially in Thackeray, who is also one of my saints: the skeleton in the house?"

Annchen started, but the odd man was surely smiling at the disagreeable question. How could he have smiled, if it

had not concerned one of his strange jests? She answered haphazard:

"I remember having read the expression, and that I did not know how to apply it."

"That's just it," said the doctor, smiling still more decidedly; "there must be an idea connected with the words; but we'll first follow Mephistopheles' advice and 'keep to the words.' Skeleton, madam, skeleton—that sounds so horrible in unaccustomed ears. Of course. The skeleton is what remains after the fair, blooming flesh has become earth again—the end of love, so to speak. 'Even if the song does not sound divine,' we wish to know nothing about the end; and when a bold young rake drinks his champagne out of a skull it only gives one charm the more to the greedy tongue. Don't you think so?"

"It may," murmured Annchen.

"It does, believe me; and, besides, the matter is perfectly simple, intelligible to a child's comprehension. Death is never a welcome guest, and so we don't particularly love his grinning counterfeit, yet still find nothing unseemly in it where it belongs; at the utmost, if we happen to be *Hamlet* and hold Yorick's skull in the hand, utter a few melancholy comments very disparaging to the value of life.

"But let us suppose, madam, that the witty prince had lived, become king, and grown fatter and wittier. Would not his humor have wholly vanished whenever afterwards he had to pass a certain staircase in the palace, though a certain garrulous old gentleman had long since found his legitimate resting place in the Père-la-Chaise of Elsinore? A skeleton in the churchyard, madam, is as harmless as a rat in the cellar or a sword in the sheath; but a skeleton under the back stairs—that's like a rat behind the tapestry. Out with the sword, and dead for a ducat! Do you understand that, madam?"

"Certainly, certainly," murmured poor Annchen.

"Why shouldn't you? You ladies have so keen a perception of what is suitable; a misplaced bow, a ribbon whose color does not harmonize with that of your dress—such

trifles can drive you to despair; and a skeleton under the back stairs! Oh, dear! And yet another thing will not have escaped your penetration; that the object of the terror in the above case no longer existed, and, I might add, need no longer exist, if it were once there; nay, nay, I'll go further: it is by no means always an osteological object, perhaps not even visible to the senses any more than the mathematical point, which no mortal eye has perceived, and yet around which the whole world turns. You are no mathematician, madam? No? That's of no consequence; we're not discussing mathematics, but morals—æsthetics, if you choose—in which women are always superior to us. Only keep to the spot, madam—the spot which we need only qualify by a single epithet, in order instantly, as if it were a proof to our example, to obtain the best possible translation of the English expression, 'We have the dark spot.'"

The doctor had removed his spectacles, and was cleaning the glasses with a yellow silk handkerchief. This would have been a great relief to the poor Annchen, as the uncomfortable man was at least obliged to take his hands from his knees; only now, with his staring, grayish-green eyes, with their inflamed lids, he still more decidedly resembled a lunatic. Had she to deal with a veritable madman, who was only displaying his eccentricities to her to hear himself talk? Was there in this nonsense a terrible meaning, which he did not like to utter plainly? She wanted to cry: "Speak out!" but it seemed as if her mouth was closed; and then the disagreeable man already had his glasses on his hawk's nose again, the palms of his hands were again busily rubbing the sharp knees, the diabolical smile again played around his lips, and he continued to speak with the strange rapidity in which there seemed to be not the smallest pause for reflection—nay, scarcely to take breath amid the rushing words.

"But the best translation, madam, rarely gives the full meaning of the original; it sometimes says too much, sometimes too little; in our case, too much. Our dear metaphorical skeleton is, to be sure, always a dark spot; but every dark spot is by no means a skeleton. There is a dark spot

in every individual existence—nay, the individual concerned may be glad if there are not several, and I've known people tattooed like a New Zealand chieftain. There is even no family that has not its dark spot—a son who must have constant remittances, a daughter who runs away with the music-teacher; but all these things bear the same relation to the real skeleton as acute diseases to chronic suffering. The skeleton is a chronic, conservative, nay, more, an exclusively aristocratic affliction. One human life is not sufficient to fully mature it; it absolutely requires generations—generations, madam, with uninterrupted historical traditions. Can we wonder that the disease was first noticed, studied, classified, and named in England, the land of hereditary wisdom and traditional folly, hereditary virtues and hereditary vice, worm-eaten old family-trees and old rat-haunted houses—that in England was made the interesting discovery: every skeleton must have an old house, and, *vice versa,* every old house must have a skeleton?"

During the last words the doctor had pushed his spectacles down so far that Annchen's face was visible to him over the brims. It was pale, perhaps even a little paler than before, but, as it seemed to him in his over-zeal, by no means with an expression of anxiety, scarcely of intense expectation. "You must hear me conjure more strongly," thought the doctor, and continued:

"There is a horrible legend, madam, that there were times when men took the second part of our thesis literally and walled up an innocent child in the foundation of a new house, which was to become an old one. Although I credit the barbarous Middle Ages with every ghastly thing possible, I will suppose, for the honor of humanity, that this never happened; we rather have to do with a bit of the poesy of the people that sought a symbolical expression for an often-noticed experience.

"But the experience was that a house rarely or never became old—what in one sense is synonymous—rich and powerful, if some one were not first found who sacrificed for it his innocence, or—to explain it more logically—

brought a sin upon it. Perhaps not in his opinion. The worthy man whose roof was falling over his ears probably thought it quite right to saddle his horse and lurk among the bushes by the highway, until with the booty lowered into the castle keep, and there transformed into purses of gold, he could build, in the name of God, a fine castle. The estimable valet who could only gratify a sovereign whim of his fiery young master at the expense of his family honor certainly did so only *in usum Delphini*—that is, for the advantage and benefit of his dear grandchildren, who wanted to live, and, God willing, should live, better than their kind, indulgent old grandpapa.

"But the dear grandchildren, madam! Do they thank the kind grandpapa for the sacrifices made for them? Why yes; they build a chapel over the place where the booty was once let down in the dead of night into the castle keep; but the weak-nerved ones cannot be married or baptized in the chapel without thinking that under the stone pavement on which they kneel lies the skeleton of the house. Perhaps the portrait of the daughter-sacrificing Agamemnon is taken from the line of ancestral portraits, because the story ended too horribly; but whenever there is dancing in the old hall, through the quavering of the violins and the growling of the bass viols the skeleton immured behind the thick gold brocade on the wall rattles audibly. You are looking at the clock, madam; it's more than a quarter of ten, and there is Lebrecht just driving out of the yard. It always makes a thundering noise in the narrow street; Lebrecht really ought to have it macadamized. You see we have an ocean of time, and I would be only too glad to show you some more specimens from my collection of skeletons, which are perhaps the most interesting of all, though they can't compare in romantic horror with the first ones, possibly even do not lack a touch of humorousness. Let us take, for instance, the following case: there is a great mercantile house that has its connections in all the countries of the known world, whose ships sail on every sea, that only reckons by hundreds of thousands; and this great firm has in a side-wing—do

you think a merchant's house can have no skeleton? Pardon me, that is a totally false idea, which I forgive the born aristocrat, and for which I have perhaps given cause by my distorted description. Think of the royal merchants of the Middle Ages, the Fuggers, the Welsers, and others, who probably in their palaces paid little heed to the noble footpads in their robbers' nests. And such an old house doesn't even need to be a palace; it only needs to stand long enough and be occupied by one and the same family—a family of doctors, we'll say, to take an example from my profession. The grandfather had been a doctor, the father of course; the son is also one. But the great-grandfather, who built the great house, was a barber by trade; and because he had built the said house, as it were, on his shaving-basin, he commanded in his will that the said basin should not only forever ornament the front in the most conspicuous place as a sign, but the barber's shop should never fall to ruin—on the contrary, be kept up till the end of all things; and each of his successors and heirs, on pain of losing the whole rich house and its business, even were he ten times *doctor medicinæ* and Æsculapius in person, must continue the barber's business in his name—nay, have been taught it, if only for a month, and used the ancestral razor. You can probably imagine, madam, how the man, one of the foremost in his department, feels with a brain full of comprehensive plans and the barber's basin in his coat-of-arms—the basin about which he has been forced to hear countless gibes in the course of his life, which has actually made his entrance into certain prominent corporations towards which his ambition soared impossible—nay, instilled into his soul, otherwise frankness and goodness incarnate, the venom of distrust, nay, cowardice!"

For the first time in his long speech the doctor made a real pause. He had even ceased to rub his knees, and, with his long neck stretched forward, was gazing at Annchen, waiting for a reply, some remark that would show she understood him, that she at least suspected what he wanted.

"Pardon me," faltered Annchen; "but I think I must look out."

The doctor felt like a person who runs against a closed door where he expected to find an open one. He who, so far as he was concerned, wanted the young wife to understand everything—his concealed allusions, his sudden transitions, his horrible pictures—found she did not understand, that she had scarcely heard and certainly not grasped the meaning of his last words, that at this moment she only had one desire: to escape from a situation which she felt she could not endure much longer. To him she was simply the spoiled young lady, the proud princess who, rolling over a smooth course in her chariot of victory—people may say what they like—can form no idea of the pitfalls a malicious fate digs for other mortals who must walk over the rough earth. And with these thoughts, which darted through his mind with the speed of lightning, a hot wave of blood rushed to his brain, and from his brain to his heart, and in that heart welled up a fiery hatred against this young, beautiful, proud creature, who had come here only to forever rob his beloved Lebrecht of rest and peace, to bring into this old house for the whole future unhappiness and ruin. Suppose he told her this?

It only lacked a little provocation and the passionate man would have done so. And now the force he was obliged to put upon himself, in order not to burst forth into words which would have permitted no misinterpretation, increased his ill-humor, as a rider in anger drives his spurs into his horse's flanks till it dashes over hedges and ditches.

"Only a moment, madam," he cried; "only wait until I have told you what part the dear little wives play in this pathology of the skeleton in the house. You will then learn that these Graces, with their velvet-soft, innocent deer-eyes, and white, rouged nixy-hands, only too often, almost always, are the original source of the outbreak of the trouble; that they, above all, are the cause that first makes the evil malignant and dangerous, and renders what might otherwise be easily endured insupportable. To the original possessor

the skeleton is always surrounded by the breath of antiquity to men; often enough he has it in his own blood and bones, and lets it stay there, simply because he could not get rid of it, perhaps would not even desire to do so, like Philoctetes with his hurt, to which he had become accustomed, and to suit which he had arranged his life, thoughts, and feelings. *Bon!*

"And now the young wife comes into the house. She is not our flesh and blood, does not know how the skeleton pinches our flesh, riots in our blood. She only finds it a horrible or ridiculous thing; she has no reverence for the skeleton, she is only afraid of it; she has no sympathy with the skeleton, she is only ashamed of it.

"And this, madam, is the best, the very best case; and well for the young husband who was wise and brave enough to say before the marriage: 'Between such and such stairs, behind such and such a tapestried wall, lies the skeleton of my house, and it is constituted so and so; and now marry me, if you have the courage.'

"Less loyal, but still prudent enough, will be the conduct of the cunning Bluebeard who, in some happy hour of love-making, mentions the skeleton *en passant*. It isn't of so much consequence; still, he will warn the charming Phyllis, when she is once Madam Bluebeard, at the risk of her sweet life, against putting her inquisitive little nose into a certain room in such and such a tower, and this is the key to it, and the key is eighteen-carat gold. For you see, madam, if the young lady does not choose to listen, and plays with the golden key until some fine day the door springs open, and in her terror she begins to lament over the horrible spectacle and make her dear husband's life uncomfortable—why, Bluebeard has studied Hegel; the punishment is the law that follows wrong-doing, and—down with the pretty, imprudent little head!

"But, madam, the case which is a thousand, ten thousand, times worse, worst of all—nay, even fatal—is when the dear Phyllis knows nothing, suspects nothing, because she has no eyes to see, no ears to hear, and asks her beloved

husband to show her the silver treasure, the precious silver treasure, in the old closet, of which she has lost the key. And the husband, who frankly tells himself that the matter must be told some time, unlocks the closet, and—the family treasure is doubtless there, sparkling and glittering, but on the treasure sits the skeleton, rattling and grimacing: 'My best greetings to you, my darling; you and I now belong together, for you probably know you have married me with the old house.'"

And as the doctor, suddenly starting up and pointing with his meager, outstretched hand, shrieked these words in his most disagreeable throat-notes, a gust of wind raged around the house, which it seemed to shake to its very foundations. The storm had probably found a chink in one of the rattling shutters; a terrible wailing, moaning note echoed through the room, and with this note mingled a shriek.

Annchen had uttered it; she was standing before the doctor, an image of horror, with pale, quivering lips and clasped hands. "In the name of God's mercy! what is in the closet?"

"Why," said the doctor, "I've already had the honor to remark: the famous bowl, *et cetera,* inclusive of the skeleton."

He made one of his grotesque bows, and, taking his hat and cane, was moving towards the door when he suddenly felt his arm seized by a trembling hand.

"I—I—first Frau Uelzen—and then through the door—your last words: He must tell me all! Is it—does it concern Hans Fliederbusch?"

The doctor passed his hand across his brow.

What had he done? The possibility, nay, probability, that Frau Uelzen might have gossiped in the meantime—the factor that he had just counted upon to Lebrecht as a very important one—was left out of his own calculations as if it had not existed. And she had heard his last treacherous words, too! Was the secret betrayed? Impossible! She would have put her question differently; she would not have

been in this terrible anxiety. Heaven knew with what marvelous story the old gossip had unsettled her brain. Was it wise to set her right? Was it not more prudent to let her grope for a while longer in the darkness that shrouded Hans's flight—nay, if possible, increase the gloom, so that the discovery of the real secret would afterwards seem like a sunbeam?

"Yes, yes," said he; "Hans Fliederbusch, the wild fellow—as you know, he has caused us a great deal of anxiety, still does so. He has probably scarcely broken his neck; but a man drowned is also dead. To be sure, he was a cat, and young cats don't drown so easily. We must wait—we must wait."

And as the doctor could not reach his knees, by way of variety he stroked his long, thin chin with his long, thin fingers.

"So Hans Fliederbusch is not—not the skeleton?"

"I haven't yet inquired into it; however, what is not may be. I've already told you that such a skeleton requires time—plenty of time."

"What is it then."

"Ah! madam, if I ought or wished to tell you I should have done so long ago. A doctor, you know, must have very rigid principles in these matters. I never meddle in family affairs, and from my discourse it must have become evident to you that a skeleton is an extremely exclusive family affair. Besides, you—I mean you and Lebrecht—are in that last-mentioned, worst, most delicate case, which by the bungling interference of a third person may have a fatal result. I shall avoid being this third person. Lebrecht will take charge of the matter. Heretofore, with the key to the old closet, he has also lacked the necessary courage. Let us hope that at the right moment he will find both—key and courage."

"I—I have the key!"

"You—you have! and you say it now—say it to me! You have concealed it from Lebrecht, and Lebrecht is making a mystery to you of a matter to which you have the key!

Upon my honor, that is the most amusing thing that has come in my way for a long time."

And the doctor laughed, laughed loudly, only it sounded more like the hoarse cackling of an old hen than human laughter.

A deep flush suffused Annchen's face to the delicate temples, and, lowering her long lashes on her burning cheeks, she said in a low, trembling voice that gradually grew firmer:

"It's very wrong of me, I know, but I meant it for a joke, I assure you. In Verona (I believe it was in Verona) before our departure—Lebrecht had gone out—I wanted something from his trunk: a guidebook we missed, and which I knew he must have. I couldn't find it, and at last took everything out to the bottom, and on the bottom I found the key wrapped in a pocket-handkerchief. I assure you it was to be a jest; I meant to ask him, casually, whether——"

"Whether it was the key to his heart?" asked the doctor with a sympathizing glance at the beautiful, embarrassed young face.

"Yes, yes!"

"And that he must take better care of it in future?"

"Yes, yes!"

"You see I, too, understand a little about affairs of the heart. Go on! But let us sit down again; we can talk better."

He offered the trembling Annchen his arm with wonderful *grandezza* and led her to the chair by the fireside, taking his old place opposite to her. His voice was no longer scornful as before, his expression no longer sarcastic; he even let his hands rest quietly on his knees.

"You meant to give him back the key as soon as you came here?"

"Yes, yes; and therefore put it in my box, to have it at hand, and then forgot it. During all the last part of the time Lebrecht's manner made me so anxious—he was often so gloomy, so absent—I thought he——"

Several large tears welled from under the dark lashes.

"Did not love you as you desired, as—as you deserved?"

The doctor had seized and pressed Annchen's hand.

"I have endured such torments!" said Annchen, sobbing. "I was always asking myself what I could have done to forfeit his love. No, no! he loves me, does he not? He loves me? But he wasn't happy, and it was I who made him miserable. Just now, when I was yonder, before Frau Uelzen came, I sat by the fireside, as I sit here. I pondered over everything again, and always lingered over the same terrible thought: 'You do not make him happy; you never will!' Then Frau Uelzen came, and talked and talked. I scarcely heard her, until—I don't know how it happened—she told me of the evening before Lebrecht's departure, how she came out of the kitchen——"

"Heard the quarrel, etc. I can imagine how the old woman kneaded and dressed the puppet. And then you remembered the key?"

"She had talked so much about the closet——"

"The nonsense people say about it! You don't really believe that?"

"No, but I thought it so horrible, so frightful, and I wondered that Lebrecht had told me nothing at all. Of course, it was only in order not to alarm me, but it would have been better. I wanted to rejoice that I had found a motive for his ill-humor, but could not do so. My heart remained oppressed, I knew not why. I took out the key to give it to him. Frau Uelzen had said he had lost the key to the closet, and I was sure that it was this very one. Then I came through the rooms, to that door—Herr Doctor, Herr Doctor, have pity on me! What *all* must Lebrecht tell me? What is in that closet?"

She had slipped from her chair to his feet, her hands clasped over her beautiful bosom, her large, tearful, brown eyes raised beseechingly to him. The strange man's passionate heart throbbed hotly. She was so beautiful, so dreamily beautiful, like one of the forms his enraptured eyes beheld in the hours of the night when the Muse with light hand touched his throbbing temples! Had not what

he just told Lebrecht really happened: "She will in her trouble turn to other men"? Should he let the fool rush to his destruction? Should he——

He had long since raised the kneeling figure and pressed it back into the chair; and now, after having paced up and down the apartment with his longest strides, approached her.

"You see, fair lady, I would fain give my finger—no, that can't be, on account of my profession—but I would give much, very much, if Lebrecht had been the wise husband number one on my list and told you of his secrets at the right time. I fear this right time is over. But however that may be, he, and he alone, must tell you; I dare not, and you are far too wise to play the clumsy part of Bluebeard's inquisitive wife. As to the skeleton itself, it belongs to the last category of those most horrible by their absurdity. And as for that silly Hans——"

"I am troubled only about him," said Annchen, in a hasty, anxious tone. "If you can assure me that there is nothing in it; people are saying such horrible things——"

"Gossip, madam, gossip!"

"But they dare to do so! And they will dare so long as the young man remains absent. O God! if he should stay away—if he should be dead, the horrible event never cleared up, the horrible suspicion—— He is suspected. I gathered it from the housekeeper's confused words."

"The stupid old woman!"

"And when you spoke just now of Herr von Frank you did not do so unintentionally; you wanted to warn Lebrecht."

"But, madam, warn of what?"

"Of the machinations of the man who—whom I have mortally offended, who has vowed vengeance on me and on Lebrecht, and who will avenge himself where and as he can."

"I didn't know that," said the doctor; "but it explains much—much. What is the cause, if I may ask? Or let it pass; I see it is painful to you."

"No, no!" cried Annchen; "you must know. Perhaps I have been too harsh; but the hateful men—they were all

so hostile to Lebrecht, my Cousin Arthur and the others, and especially Herr von Frank. And Lebrecht, he let nothing be noticed—he's too proud for that—but I saw he knew that they joked about him behind his back—about his name, which isn't very beautiful—and I was horribly afraid he would fly into a rage, for he can be very angry. And I was told that there was a poem by Herr von Frank, a friend——"

"Of course," said the doctor.

"It was horrible—a parody on Heine's 'Lorelei,' and ended:

"'This hath Herr Lebrecht Nudel, the King of Woldom, done.'

I was furious. I took the first opportunity on the steamer, went up to him, and said——"

"Ah! madam, I don't envy him in anticipation."

"I said, 'People ought to beware of caricaturists, but caricaturists must also beware; kings have a long arm.'"

"Magnificent! And the man?"

"I had given him no time to answer; but I learned through my friend that he had sworn a terrible oath to repay me; and now misfortune must bring him here at this moment, when my parents, my poor parents—my dear papa, if he should hear of it—and the assessor will attend to that—it will make such a bad impression upon papa that Lebrecht won't open the closet. Won't he do so if I tell him I have the key? Won't he?"

The doctor rubbed his knees.

"That's a doubtful question," he said. "Lebrecht has undoubtedly told your father that the king's bowl can't be used this evening; he would be placed in a very embarrassing position, and I should not like to increase his perplexity, which is already too great. You, too, madam, from a timidity I understand, have missed the right moment. Suppose we let the key, which, according to my sincere conviction, only plays a symbolic part, morally considered, in this disagreeable affair, remain lost. The real key is quite different, and this Lebrecht may, and I hope to Heaven he will, find late,

but not too late for the true love that endures and forgives everything. You have the key with you?"

"Yes," said Annchen hesitatingly.

"I'll make you a proposal: give it to me."

"Here it is."

Annchen felt in her pocket and drew it out, wrapped in the handkerchief. The doctor, who only wanted the key, unfolded the handkerchief and was in the act of returning it to her when he suddenly drew back his outstretched hand and hastily thrust it into the side-pocket of his coat.

"Is it blood?"

Annchen had spoken, in so low a tone that it seemed almost a miracle the doctor should have heard. He had really been able to read the words from the pale, trembling lips because at the same moment the same question flashed through his own mind.

"Only a chemical analysis could determine that," he said, buttoning his coat and rising.

"It is blood!" cried Annchen, sinking down in the chair as if utterly crushed.

Dr. Bertram gazed compassionately from his height at the drooping figure.

"And if it should be so," he said slowly, "and what has happened will perhaps never be cleared up, because Lebrecht himself—I hope so, as I am his friend—only knows the beginning, not the end, of the matter? It is the evil will that makes the criminal—not the act; and therefore in the eyes of friendship Lebrecht can never be a criminal. Would he, could he, ever become one in those of love?"

"Never! never! never!" cried Annchen, clasping her hands.

"Whatever has happened?"

"I love him! I love him!"

"And may God bless you!"

The doctor took a step and paused again.

"I know he will; take courage. In the Middle Ages marriage was denied those who gave themselves to the

devil; for love, Wolfram von Eschenbach says, is everywhere except in hell. But marriage is the highest purity of love, and he who walks in its light goes on the way to sanctification. Only God often leads His saints by strange ways. The lover would fain make the May breezes milder for the woman he loves; and she, for his sake, defies the autumnal storm, and, if it must be, goes through fire and water for him. Once more, I hope there will be no necessity; and once more, God bless you."

The noise of the door first warned Annchen that the doctor had left her. She started up; she ought not to have given him the key. She wanted to call him back, rushed towards a door; but it led into the dining-room, and when she reached and opened the one into the entry it was too late. The house-door was just closing with a crash that echoed through the lofty space like distant thunder. Then it grew still, and she, leaning against the jambs, listened breathlessly with a throbbing heart and murmured: "I ought not to have given him the key."

VI

The doctor was deeply moved by the scene through which he had just passed. Full of the most sincere admiration for the beautiful young wife and the greatest anxiety about his beloved friend, he had walked mechanically, stepping slowly down the stairs, to the lower entry, and reached the door, which he held open, irresolute whether to turn back and undertake the investigation of the suspicious closet himself or go on and declare the bad case, in whose management he had so strongly interfered, to be hopeless, when a gust of wind snatched the door from his hand and closed it behind him.

"The confounded wind!" he cried furiously.

"It's a bad night," said a hoarse voice beside him.

"Holloa!" cried the doctor.

"It's I—Kabelmann."

"What are you looking for here? Has your wife grown worse?"

"Heaven forbid, doctor!"

"Well?"

"I've to ask you to come to the Herr Assessor—on official business."

The doctor involuntarily made a movement towards the handle of the door, though he knew it had locked and was not to be opened from outside. So, in order to gain time for consideration, he said:

"What is it, Kabelmann? Is it Frau Ledebur? I told the Herr Assessor the poor woman would be crazy if he tormented her much longer with darkness and questions."

"It's not about Frau Ledebur, Herr Doctor; she is now, owing to your intercession, in Number 7, where she at least has air and light; and she has had hot food to-day, too, and told me herself: 'Kabelmann, I owe this to the district doctor; he'—it was a very bad word, Herr Doctor—'he would have left me to rot on the straw.' It's" (the policeman, who towered above even the tall doctor half a head, stooped and said in his hoarsest tone)—"I ought not to say it, but you won't betray me, Herr Doctor, I know—it's about Herr Nudel and young Herr Fliederbusch."

The doctor tried to laugh, but only accomplished a cough, which the wind drove back into his throat.

"You know something, Kabelmann; you needn't announce it officially, but the devil ought to take your Herr Assessor."

The policeman pushed up his cap and scratched his short, stiff hair.

"Oh, yes! Herr Doctor; I'd have no objection, and the devil is in it, too; and if he once gets anything into his head he has no rest day or night till he knows all about it, and now he knows."

"Nonsense!" said the doctor. "He's crazy!"

"Yes, yes, Herr Doctor; for aught I care he may be crazy, too, and I wouldn't grudge him Number 24 rather

than Frau Ledebur—if it were not for that confounded closet."

A cold chill ran through the doctor's veins. "So he knows that, too!"

"He didn't find it out from me," continued the policeman apologetically, "though I might have told him, for I know the house like my own pocket, and the closet up in the corner room, where the late senator lived, who kept his documents in it. I've moved them in and out often myself. One day, when I was standing before it, he said: 'Kabelmann, what do you think? How many thousand thalers have I brought out of the hole in Gallows Hill?' 'Why, Herr Senator,' said I, 'who believes that?' 'Kabelmann believes it, and the whole city,' he said, and then laughed, and I laughed too, for he was fond of his little jokes. But Nebelow swears through thick and thin that the Herr Senator could go out of his room without opening a door, and has probably said so to one and another. 'Don't talk about it to the Herr Assessor, Nebelow,' said I; and he didn't when he questioned him about the closet upstairs of which people were speaking. Well, Herr Doctor, I have really said nothing to him except always, 'It's only stupid gossip, Herr Assessor,' and thought he would be satisfied with it, until half an hour ago he rang for me, and was rushing around his room, rubbing his hands and saying, 'Well, Kabelmann, I know all about it; and at ten o'clock, when Herr Nudel comes back, we'll examine the closet to see if we can't find something that will please his young wife.' 'Why, Herr Assessor,' said I, 'Herr Nudel's been back ever since eight o'clock, and has just gone down to the station again to get the old people;' for I had talked with Nebelow, Herr Doctor, whom Frau Uelzen had sent to Senator Zingst to get some silver, because Herr Nudel had lost the key to the closet; and I told the Herr Assessor so, and that the Herr Doctor was with the young wife. Then the Herr Assessor laughed, just like an old ape, and said, 'Has he lost the key? We'll try to help him look for it a little.' And I must go and tell the Herr Doctor, 'You were to come at once, the Herr

Assessor had urgent business matters to discuss with you,' and there you were, just coming out."

The doctor, much as he would have liked to get away quietly, let the old man finish; now he turned up his coat-collar, saying, "Very well, Kabelmann; in an hour, tell him; I've really no time now."

He took a step forward; the policeman remained standing.

"You can't do it, Herr Doctor; it's no use. He sent Martin to the station at once; he's not to leave Herr Nudel, though without letting Herr Nudel notice it. I heard him give the orders myself."

"Ah! then wait a minute; I'll be here again directly."

The doctor grasped the bell-handle. The policeman shook his head.

"Don't do it, Herr Doctor. Nebelow isn't there; it might be a long time before the door would be opened, and I have the strictest orders to bring you without delay. I wonder already that he hasn't sent again."

"Then say you didn't find me—I had already gone."

"I can't, Herr Doctor; I must answer for it on my oath of office. I'll tell you what, Herr Doctor, come with me; perhaps he'll hear reason, if you talk with him, and let the matter drop, at least until to-morrow. The poor young wife! the very first evening—it's too horrible. To be sure, it will be all over to-morrow."

"But, Kabelmann," cried the doctor, "you're a sensible old fellow; do you really believe that a man kills another without cause and then travels quietly away and gets married?"

"Why, yes," replied Kabelmann. "He probably had cause, and probably he hasn't felt very quiet, but everything else has happened before, and even far more curious things. But now come, Herr Doctor, it's high time."

The doctor reflected. It really seemed best for him to go. Even if he should not convince Herr von Frank that his suspicion was groundless—and how could he do so? how many damaging circumstances might not the man's keen nose have already scented out?—he had one weapon in case

of necessity: he could say, "I know the personal motives by which you are urged on in this affair"—a weak weapon, indeed, against so malicious and dangerous a man, yet he must see what could be accomplished with it.

Dull sounds echoed through the storm-lashed air from the steeple of the neighboring church. Quarter of ten! In half an hour, at latest, Lebrecht would be there with his parents-in-law, and the young, pale, beautiful wife——

"Now then, Kabelmann!" said the doctor, passing out of the deep doorway where this conversation had taken place, along the front of the old gable-roofed house, past the little narrow street, towards the Rathhaus.

The old policeman followed silently.

Meantime the doctor's departure had not remained unnoticed in the kitchen regions. Dörthe, who had already been standing a long time at the little window through which a portion of the gallery and staircase could be overlooked, dropped the curtain, and, turning to Frau Uelzen, said:

"Well, at last! Now go in and ask what I'm to cook."

"I won't stir from this place," replied Frau Uelzen, slowly twirling her thumbs; "if the lady has time to chatter an hour with the doctor, instead of attending to her housekeeping, it's all the same to me."

"Why, that's what you're housekeeper for," said Dörthe; "and a young wife always has something particular to say to the doctor."

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Dörthe? Such a young thing!" said Frau Uelzen.

"Well, I wasn't born yesterday," said the girl, laughing; "people know how things go on in the world; and I must say I like her."

"I don't buy a cat in a bag," said Frau Uelzen, with a philosophical look at the shining tins on the large kitchen-dresser.

"She doesn't look a bit like a cat now," said Dörthe. "She has such kind, earnest eyes, and she is so beautiful, with such a slight, graceful figure. And how her brown traveling-dress fitted! Ah! Frau Uelzen, there's nothing

like it in this country; even Frau Senator Zingst can't be compared with her. She might be a little more lively; it could do no harm. Dear me! when I think of it—so young and so beautiful and so rich, and a young, rich, handsome husband!"

"I thank God that I'm not in her skin," said Frau Uelzen.

The girl laughed loudly. "That would be hard, Frau Uelzen," she said.

"We shall see," said Frau Uelzen; "I've been here longest."

"You say so, Frau Uelzen."

"I don't say so; it is so!" replied Frau Uelzen eagerly. "A person who has lived with so many employers as I knows when the pot has a hole, which in brushing it out will be found. It's just the same here as at Baron Grieben's, where I was housekeeper five years. He married young Countess Püstow, and not a week had passed when he shot himself in his own bedroom, for his young wife slept at the other end of the castle. And" (Frau Uelzen drew her chair a few inches nearer and said in a mysterious tone)"he had six toes on his right foot; the woman who laid him out told me so herself."

"Merciful Heavens!" cried Dörthe, clasping her red hands, "didn't she know it? I mean, what was the young wife?"

Frau Uelzen evaded the question by continuing in a mysterious whisper:

"There was Herr von Lindblad, from Sweden, who married the youngest of the twelve Passelwitz fräuleins, and to whom old Herr von Passelwitz gave Randow, because he was completely infatuated with him. And one day his first wife, from whom he had run away, came from Sweden, and sent in her name——"

"Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! what people!" cried Dörthe. "What did the poor wife say—I mean the second one?"

"What did she say? She said nothing at all, but ordered the carriage and took her two little children—the youngest wasn't six months old; but the other had brought some too,

real tow-heads—and drove back to Passelwitz, and now she is living in Lundin."

"And you think our master has a wife hidden away?" asked Dörthe.

Frau Uelzen smiled scornfully. "Worse things happen, Dörthe; and I say when the old people come a week earlier than they intended, and send a telegram, and the master turns as white as chalk when he reads it, and we have no silver for the company, and he has lost the key and won't have the closet opened, there's a reason for it, I say, and Nebelow says so too."

"And you both ought to be ashamed of yourselves," cried Dörthe angrily; "for it isn't right, when one's living in a house, and has lived in it so long, and something happens in the house, nobody knows what, to let the folks in the city talk with them—yes, and even say worse things—till it makes the hair of a poor girl who has lived here six weeks stand on end, merely because Herr Fliederbusch has run away—and I certainly liked him—when he was always the wildest fellow at Mother Ihlefeldt's; but now I wish he might get as many thrashings as he has been days away; then he'd probably come back."

"As for coming back, he won't fail to do that; he has already announced himself twice this evening," said old Nebelow, who, unnoticed by the two angry women, had entered the kitchen.

"If you say such a thing again, I'll scream!" cried Dörthe.

"Announced himself! Where? When? How? Speak!" exclaimed Frau Uelzen.

The old man had dropped the box he carried under his arm on the dresser so that some of the spoons rolled out, and, sinking into the chair from which Frau Uelzen had started in her first fright, sat there with shaking knees, while his bloodshot, watery eyes stared fixedly at the stone floor.

"Speak out!" cried Frau Uelzen again.

"Or I'll scream!" exclaimed Dörthe.

"Let him come to his senses first," said Frau Uelzen.

She had taken a bottle from the kitchen closet and filled a small glass, which she held under the old man's nose. He took it with a trembling hand, then emptied it at a single draught, cleared his throat, and, still staring at the floor, said in his hollow voice:

"It was about seven o'clock, an hour before the master and mistress came. I was below, asking the young men if they didn't want to shut up, on account of the singing at ten. And Böhm, the shoemaker, was there, telling them that the Herr Assessor sent for him yesterday, showed him a pair of boots, and asked if they were Herr Fliederbusch's boots, because he has always worked for Herr Fliederbusch; and Böhm said, 'Yes, those were his boots and where did the Herr Assessor get them?' And the Herr Assessor began to laugh very spitefully, and said 'that didn't concern him; he knew enough now, and he could go.' And we were talking it over, and Herr Schmidt was lighting the lamps, because it was already growing dark, and saying, 'How could anybody swear to boots made three months ago? and he scarcely knew how Herr Fliederbusch looked, and it was only six weeks since he disappeared;' and I was looking towards the window, wondering whether I really remembered, and there was his face peering in at me between the two loaves of sugar, so that I spilled half my rum, and when I looked again it was gone. Give me some more, Frau Uelzen."

The housekeeper willingly filled his glass for the second time; the old man drank, cleared his throat, and continued:

"I told Kabelmann this just now as I passed the Rathhaus, where he was standing in the doorway, and Kabelmann said, 'He's stone dead, and the Herr Assessor found the boots himself among the pine trees on Gallows Hill—Martin was with him—and he went straight to the place, as if he had scented them like a pointer, Martin says; and,' said Kabelmann, 'he'll find it out. Only hold your tongue about the closet; I'll do so too, then it won't be we who brought him to the gallows.' 'Why, where shall I say anything?'

I answered. Well, so I went on to the Zingsts and asked to borrow a dozen spoons, because company was coming and our master had lost the key to the closet. The Herr Senator looked at his wife and the wife looked at the Herr Senator —they were just sitting down to dinner—and the wife got up and brought the spoons, and looked at me, and never said a single word, nor I either; and I was still thinking it over as I crossed the market-place, and the rain beat into my face, and I struck my umbrella against the door of the house. 'Are you drunk, Balthazar Nebelow?' I said to myself, shutting the umbrella. 'Nebelow!' said a voice beside me."

"Nonsense!" cried Dörthe.

"Hush!" cried Frau Uelzen. "Herr Fliederbusch?"

"I ask that too," said the old man—"Herr Fliederbusch? For it was just as he used to call out from the counting-house window across the courtyard when they wanted to know whether the master had gone out, that they might get to Mother Ihlefeldt's an hour earlier. Then the voice called again, 'Nebelow!' so that I almost dropped the handle; and just as I was opening the door something came up and an ice-cold hand seized me behind by the neck, and for the third time——"

A terrible rushing and rattling did not allow the old man to finish; flames a foot long darted out of the fire; dense clouds of smoke followed, filling the kitchen. Dörthe, who during the old man's terrible story had entirely lost her courage, screamed shrilly and fell upon her knees, covering her face with her hands and continuing to shriek when a hand, which she took for Frau Uelzen's, was laid upon her shoulder, until a voice, that was not Frau Uelzen's voice, said, "What is the matter with the girl?"

Dörthe remained on her knees, and, stretching out her clasped hands towards her young mistress, exclaimed amid convulsive sobs:

"I can't help it; I struggled as long as I could, and always said, 'It's a sin and a shame to tell such things about our master;' and I don't believe them, madam—I really don't."

"Rise, dear child," said Annchen.

The girl rose from her knees and went to the hearth, half turning her back upon her mistress, suppressing her sobs as well as she could, and terribly perplexed as to what she ought to answer if the lady asked her why she had screamed so, and what she didn't believe.

But her mistress seemed to take no further notice of her, only asked in a perfectly quiet voice, at which Dörthe wondered greatly, whether it often smoked in the kitchen, and what spoons those were in the box, and who had given orders to get them. Frau Uelzen was then obliged to answer that she had done so because the master had gone away without leaving anything behind, and she didn't want to disturb her mistress, and the company couldn't eat without spoons.

To this Annchen made no special reply, only asked whether the table was laid, and for how many. Frau Uelzen might be kind enough to take her to the guest-rooms, which she would like to see before her parents arrived, although she was sure that nothing would be lacking.

With these words Annchen left the kitchen, taking Frau Uelzen with her.

Frau Uelzen had a feeling that her mistress, who had had a very different look in her eyes and spoken in a very different tone, was very angry, and determined to anticipate the storm. "To be sure, she ought not to make her responsible if disagreeable rumors were going about the city—nay, she had said just now that people's tongues wouldn't be stopped, and now her mistress had heard it with her own ears. But how can it be otherwise, when the Herr Assessor is actually plotting to deprive the master of honor and reputation and —God forgive him the sin!—bring him to the gallows? She hadn't wanted to speak of it again, in order not to trouble the young wife, who had just come into the house. However, after all, it was very well that she should know it and tell the master what he had to expect from the Herr Assessor, that he might beware of him in time, for in a little city, it is said, 'trust—whom?' And when a person who, next to the Herr Bürgermeister, was the chief in the

city, and always wore polished boots and yellow kid gloves, went himself in the horrible weather to Gallows Hill to look for a pair of old boots, and afterwards sent for Böhm, the shoemaker, to swear that they were Herr Fliederbusch's, she should like to ask the mistress whether such a person could be trusted across the street?"

It had been extremely unpleasant to Frau Uelzen that while she said this, standing at the end of the room smoothing the beds and arranging the pillows, her mistress, who, turning her back upon her, stood at the window, did not utter a single word in reply, and in consequence of this she had said more and used stronger colors. But how she started when Annchen, suddenly turning, showed her a face as white as the curtains that fell on the right and left of her figure, and so rigid that even the large brown eyes did not move; and now, with the white face and fixed eyes, walked past her to the door, that had remained open, and there, without looking back, said, in a tone that did not sound at all as if she were speaking, "If I am wanted, I shall be in the master's room."

Frau Uelzen was so startled that for several minutes after her mistress had disappeared she remained standing in the same spot as if nailed to the earth, and when she returned to the kitchen gave Annchen's order to Balthazar, but in reply to the questions of the old man and Dörthe as to what it meant only answered, "If other people wanted to burn their fingers, they might do so. For her part, she wouldn't speak another word, even if her tongue were torn out of her mouth with red-hot pincers."

But Annchen sat by the fireside in Lebrecht's room, with her white hands pressed upon her white face, and before her closed eyes the picture she had just seen, looking from the window of the sleeping-room across the narrow street into a room in the Rathhaus several feet below the one where she was, and brightly lighted by a lamp suspended from the ceiling and several candles placed upon a large table covered with books and papers. But over this table leaned the little, hump-backed figure of Herr von Frank, the gray silhouette

clearly outlined against the light background, gesticulating with his thin arm to the doctor, who with bowed head stood before him, stroking his chin with his hand, apparently listening silently to the hunchback's eager words. And then the doctor, in his turn, began to gesticulate with his long arms, till it looked as if every moment he would clutch the thick hair that grew low on the little man's forehead, while the latter had crossed his arms over his breast and was listening with a scornful smile. And then Herr von Frank had suddenly turned towards the table and touched a bell, upon which a tall figure in uniform entered and stood behind the doctor, while Herr von Frank, without sitting down, leaned over the table and hastily wrote on a sheet of paper that glittered like snow in the light of the candles. But the doctor, without turning, had stretched his arm behind him towards the man in uniform, who also put out his long arm, so that their hands touched for a moment and then separated, just as Herr von Frank put the folded sheet in an envelope, which he addressed and handed to the officer, who instantly walked to the door, out of the lofty vaulted room, through narrow corridors, down a broad staircase into the market-place, on whose high, gable-roofed houses flared the lurid light of torches blazing on a black-draped scaffold in the center of the square; and on the scaffold he was standing, pale and sad, and, looking towards his own house, stretched his arms to her: "You might have saved me, but you let the key be taken from me, and now I must die." And then came thick darkness, and from the darkness flashed lightning like a flaming sword.

Annchen started from her horrible vision. Before her stood the man she expected.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "I was shown in here. I am to present the Herr Assessor's compliments and hand you this letter."

The old policeman's hoarse voice trembled, and the big brown hand in which he held the letter trembled, and he wondered that the little white hand that received it was so firm and the beautiful young lady, who now approached the

table to read by the light of the lamp, remained standing perfectly erect, read it quietly through, laid it on the table, and then, turning to him, said calmly, "Very well, I thank you."

The old man shook his head. "No occasion, madam; and by your leave, madam—I'm a good friend of your husband and the doctor—may I ask what the Herr Assessor wrote to you?"

"Only that he will come here in half an hour with the Herr Doctor to pay his respects to me and my parents. We have known him a long time."

And as she said this she smiled so strangely that an icy chill ran down the old man's back. He said in a whisper:

"If you know him, madam, you will probably know how to use the half-hour you perhaps still have, and what you must do with the key the Herr Doctor secretly gave me."

VII

Annchen did not move from her seat until the man had closed the door behind him; then she darted to it as if on wings, turned the key, flew to the second, which opened into the dining-room, and a third leading into the *salon,* locking both. Then she rushed to the table and seized the huge key, shuddering as if she had touched red-hot iron. For several minutes it seemed as if she would drop it, but she held it, while her eyes rested on the letter lying beside it:

"Madam: An accusation made in this office an hour ago in regard to a very sad affair—the matter in question concerns the hitherto unexplained, though not wholly traceless, disappearance of a young man from your husband's counting-house—compels me at least to partially search your house this very evening. It really did not require the intervention of Doctor Bertram, who is with me at this moment, and, in his character of district physician, must attend the search, to induce me to discharge my painful duty in

the most considerate manner possible. This consideration would, at any rate, be dictated by regard for the hitherto unsullied reputation of your husband, the bearer of so distinguished, I might say illustrious, a name; by the warm friendship that has bound me so many years to your family; by the sincere admiration I have always personally paid you from a respectful distance. So you will permit me to mingle in the joyful group at the moment your husband brings your honored parents to your arms, as a quiet, interested guest, who will linger behind a short time after your unsuspicious parents have retired to rest.

"Madam, I do not say a word for myself. To attempt apology here would be to accuse myself. It is my destiny to displease you, but precisely because it is my destiny I must endure it. There is a feeling which transcends every other: the consciousness of duty.

"With deep respect,

"Oscar von Frank."

"The consciousness of duty!" murmured Annchen; "I will learn from this fiend." The key no longer burned in her fingers; she held it firmly in her right hand, and in the left the candle she had taken from the mantelpiece. So she rushed towards that corner of the room where the thick walls, projecting several feet, must conceal the closet. The doctor had also pointed towards this spot. Yet, flashing the light up and down over the hangings of the dark yellow leather, she could not find the keyhole. The seconds grew to eternities. "Oh, God! Oh, God!" she moaned, "where, where? Oh, God, help me. There!"

The key entered the lock.

And again the storm howled in that terrible tone through the window close by which she now stood; the yellow curtain waved to and fro as if someone behind was moving it; there was a clattering in the closet, as if bones were rattling. "Oh, God! help me."

The doors sprang open, both at once. At the same moment a large object directly before her fell, striking with

a dull sound on the thick carpet. It was probably a board that had become loosened from the door. She noticed it as little as the danger she had escaped. She did not even heed the articles that stood in long rows on the shelves which filled the right side of the closet from bottom to top—the tall candlesticks, magnificent vases, glittering heaps of spoons, knives, and forks, the sparkling cups and tankards, the huge bowl, a royal gift amid this royal treasure. What did she care for it now? There on the left, in the vast, empty space in one of the deep corners, where not even the light of the candle penetrated, suppose she should wander, grope her way onward, never again find the exit out of the terrible gloom to the light of day. "Help me! help me!"

She had reached the opposite side. There was no opening, only smooth walls covered with very old-fashioned tapestry, where on wooden shelves lay and hung various articles—a few old saddles, bridles with silver ornaments, whips and skates of the most varied forms, nets and rods, hunting guns with their appurtenances, several pairs of high boots evidently for Lebrecht's by no means small feet——

"What are you looking for?"

The voice seemed above her as she knelt on the floor at the end of the closet, rummaging among the various articles —a gentle, vibrating tone, like divine accents. It could be no human voice.

Poor Annchen clasped her hands, as she had done as a child when she prayed fervently to her favorite saints and fancied she saw the radiant image almost in bodily form before her. Her trembling lips murmured a half-forgotten prayer.

"Can I help you?"

The voice was behind her—louder, firmer, a human voice. And she had locked all the doors!

Annchen did not scream; after what she had experienced during the last few hours, and even minutes, she was steeled against any earthly horror. She seized the candle, which she had set on the floor behind her, and rising, turned.

But even to a more timid nature there would have been

nothing horrible in the aspect of the young man who, now brightly illuminated by the candle held high in her upraised right hand, stood in the open door of the closet—a handsome young face, with soft, brown waving locks, large blue eyes twinkling roguishly, and a little dark mustache on the quivering upper lip, beneath which the white teeth flashed for a moment.

"Hans Fliederbusch!" cried Annchen.

The handsome young fellow, bowing gracefully, clasped both hands over his breast, and said, with downcast eyes, which he instantly smilingly raised again:

"Of the race of the Asra, who die if the mistress does not forgive."

It sounded so sincere and yet so comical. A cry of joy burst from Annchen's oppressed heart, while tears gushed from her eyes so that for a few moments she was fairly blinded. And then she did not know how she had come from the closet and put the candle out of her hand; but the young man was now kneeling at her feet, pressing her hands, which he held clasped in his, to his brow and lips, and saying over and over again, "Forgive me, dear, dear lady, and plead for me to my kind master!"

And then she was sitting in a chair because her knees trembled, but now with joyful agitation, and Hans was standing beside her, talking and telling his story with wonderful fluency, in his graceful, drolly-theatrical way, with numerous gesticulations and many a half-suppressed laugh.

"How did I get into the house, madam? Ten minutes ago, close behind that old donkey of a Nebelow, who, out of fright at a little trick I played him, left the door open. Could I have found it easier? Then I glided cautiously upstairs and reached the top just as you were going to the guest-room with Frau Uelzen. Then I slipped into this room and stood behind the curtains while Kabelmann—isn't he a fine old fellow?—gave you the letter from the Herr Assessor."

Here Hans had the greatest inclination to give way to uncontrollable laughter, but before the beautiful, sparkling

eyes, that seemed to be drinking the words from his lips, he calmed himself and said:

"Oh, madam! it's really too tempting when a person can be so thoroughly deceived. Listen, madam. I've already been here in Woldom three days, hidden at my friend Captain Martin's, who, on the night I took the *salto mortale* out of the window into the garden, and then climbed by the help of the old pear-tree over the wall—one of my best performances, madam, that nobody can easily imitate—received me on board his ship, which was lying in the harbor, and sailed for Stettin that very night. And Martin, good soul! has kept my secret faithfully. I haven't lacked money—once more through Martin—and, between ourselves, madam, I shouldn't have come back again so soon if there hadn't been so much difficulty in acting; and that everybody will find who, like me, has wandered for six weeks with such a company of strolling players from town to town and village to village of our beloved Pomerania in this detestable autumn weather. A week ago the star that lighted the bottomless paths for our poor chariot of Thespis led us here to the neighborhood of Woldom; and whether it was repentance that now came over me, or longing for my dear master and the old business and old house, or whether I already saw in my mind's eye the beautiful young mistress who must soon enter the old house and would help me beseech, if my own entreaties for pardon were not sufficient—enough, I shook the honest, not invariably clean hands of my brothers and sisters in Apollo and hastened to the arms of my friend Martin, who luckily had just returned from his voyage.

"And now, madam, while I was on the watch with Martin, awaiting the moment of meeting and reconciliation with my beloved master, in Martin's two little rooms that smelt strongly of tarred boots, I heard through him, to my great delight, what marvelous stories of my disappearance were in circulation throughout the city; and how, to explain this disappearance, even the tale of the fabulous passage from the master's room here to Gallows Hill had been

revived; and how the new chief of police had questioned and taken the deposition of *Crethi und Plethi,* who might know something about the matter, and thus roused the whole city, until the oldest huckster-woman swore that the master had killed Hans, dragged him out of his room through the secret passage to Gallows Hill, and buried him there under the pine-trees. Except the boots! those he had in some way forgotten, and—right; day before yesterday the Herr Assessor found them. We—Martin and I—had put them there for him, under the last stone towards the sea on the giant's grave; and the Herr Assessor couldn't mistake, for one 'who knew about the matter'—do you understand, madam?—and 'whose conscience reproached him,' had described the spot exactly in a letter, whose contents the evil conscience probably made so illegible and unorthographical. It was a capital joke, madam, to see them march off with the old boots, and we were standing near behind some big pine-trees, laughing fit to kill ourselves.

"Then Martin, who in passing by this afternoon inquired at the counting-house, heard that you would come by the express-train; and the same unhappy person with the bad conscience and defective spelling, I must confess to my shame, wrote in the same doubtful hand to the Herr Assessor that there was danger in delay, but if he (the Herr Assessor) would have courage to enter the old house with the returning master, and commence his search without delay in the closet in the master's room, he wouldn't need to seek long to find the skeleton in the house."

"The skeleton!" cried Annchen—"the skeleton!"

"The expression was a little strong, madam, I admit, and might for that very reason easily betray the whole affair; but the ominous word came naturally to the writer's pen because he had heard it so often from Dr. Bertram's mouth. You have made his acquaintance, madam, and doubtless heard it too. But, notwithstanding, it was possible that the fox might enter the trap, and the person with the evil conscience, who had been prowling around the house all evening

ever since it had grown dark, had seen you and your husband arrive, so long before the appointed time, and the master afterwards drive to the station again to get someone."

"My parents," said Annchen.

"I thought so; and while I stood at my post at the house-door, and heard from the doctor and that good old soul of a Kabelmann that the Herr Assessor hasn't even hesitated at the skeleton—I should have done so, madam, if I had been in his place—then my conscience really did reproach me, and I saw I had carried the joke too far, and that, taken all in all, it was a poor joke, the worse because one who wishes to ask forgiveness should play no pranks at all. And then it occurred to me that the young mistress, on whose intercession I so strongly relied, even though her husband had told her about the mad quarrel the evening before the wedding-journey, and how we took the thing yonder down and put it in the closet, and——"

"What is that?" asked Annchen, for the first time glancing at the long black board which just now, when she opened the closet, had almost fallen upon her, and now lay as it had dropped, directly at her feet, between her and Hans, who had just pointed to it with his finger.

"Don't you know?" asked Hans.

"Why, yes—a board," said Annchen, laughing at the odd expression that Hans's face assumed at the singular question.

"Don't you know what is on the other side of the board?"

"As it isn't transparent——"

"Oh, Heavens!" cried Hans, "Oh, Heavens! is it possible? He has told you nothing about it up to this day, up to this hour? He has concealed it from you so long, so long—he who usually lives and ought to live in a crystal palace, because his heart is pure as the heart of the water——"

"What is it?" asked Annchen, whose heart, in spite of Hans's mad declamation, began to throb anxiously. "I wish to know."

"You wish it—really wish it? Well, then, madam, be kind enough to go back a few steps, or you won't get the

perspective for which it is intended. I'll kneel here no longer for myself; it is for my dear master. Oh, pitiful fate of kings! You will see the veil withdrawn from the secrets of majesty by my hand."

He had placed the board on the long edge.

"What does this mean?" asked Annchen.

"Good Lord! Good Lord! the letters are big enough," murmured Hans between his white teeth.

"I intended to say, what does this joke mean?"

Hans dropped the board, but backward, so that the inscription remained uppermost, sprang to his feet, and exclaimed:

"Joke, do you call it? Joke! cruel woman, joke! A thing that has almost broken my kind master's heart! A joke on account of which he nearly killed his most beloved and faithful servant! A joke, poor, unsuspicious lady! Haven't you read the date in the left corner, 1654, and the words in the opposite one—'*Renovatum* 1854'? *Renovatum,* madam, means 'renewed,' 'restored,' 'freshened up'—by old Herr Senator Lebrecht the First, King of Woldom, who on his death-bed entreated Lebrecht the Second, if he valued the parental blessing that builds children's houses, to let it hang as it had hung for two centuries, yonder under that window. And Lebrecht the Second let it hang, though when he assumed the government, with by no means clear conscience and Jesuitical cunning, he barred the shutters even in the narrow Rathhaus street until that night. And he said to me here in this room, by that table, which was full of empty bottles, and the hour for ghosts was approaching—'Hans,' he said, 'the people in the house with the plate-glass windows and flower-decked balconies yonder in the holy city by the waves of the Rhine do not know that here in Woldom, on the shore of the Baltic, every huckster-woman gets her half-ounce of coffee and every cobbler's apprentice his salt herring at the King of Woldom's.' 'Well?' I said. 'She wouldn't marry me if she knew it.' 'Let her go, then,' said I. Madam, don't set the horrible crime down to my account; I hadn't seen you. So he only

smiled contemptuously. And now came the story of his sufferings: how he thanked God that you at least didn't find his name—it's yours, too, now, madam, and the rose, it is said—and so I'll say no more; and how he didn't have courage to add to the treacherous name—you understand me, madam?—the fact too; and how he had continued to offend by letting day after day and week after week elapse without confessing what, as he firmly believed, would make a marriage with him impossible, if not in your own divine eyes, in those of your relatives and friends; and he must now continue to offend, and should do so, he knew, up to the moment when, driving across the old market-place, you would see the sign. 'Then come in the night,' said I. 'It would threaten me through the deepest darkness like characters of flame.' Madam, don't be vexed with me, but he really seemed half out of his senses; for my part, I was at least quarter-part so; and thus, three-quarters crazy as we were together, it was done. But, I swear it, only by myself. I had the clever idea; I took it from its old hooks; I put it there in the closet, somewhat clumsily, as I saw afterwards—I was almost frightened to death, you poor, brave lady—and put the key in my pocket. 'For,' said I, 'it might be that the King of Woldom would pluck up the necessary courage, which so long as I have been in his service he has never lacked, and would do me the favor to write to me to hang it again, in the darkness and rain, in the old place, and then let other people rack their brains about how it got away and came back again and if he didn't pluck up the courage——'

"I looked into his eyes, his handsome blue eyes, madam, and saw that he wouldn't—that he would defer until the very last moment the revelation so terrible to him.

"And now, madam, when I saw the strong man so weak, the King of Woldom so helpless, the tempter came to me and whispered, 'Now he must do—now he must give you the permission for which you have begged, in jest and earnest, a hundred times: to be allowed to show an astonished world that Garrick, Talma, and Ludwig Devrient were

miserable bunglers in comparison with Hans Fliederbusch, the only real actor!' And now, madam, he whom I thought I had in my pocket would not consent. I entreated—he refused; I pleaded—he laughed at me; I grew angry—he called me a fool; I defied him—he forbade me once for all, so long as he was my guardian; and I—I, pitiful rascal—I threatened—threatened to betray my master. I swore by all that was sacred. I wasn't in earnest, and should never have done so; but the heavy Burgundy, dear lady, and the late hour! I was certainly terribly unmannerly, and deserved the soundest thrashing, let alone the one blow he, I know, only gave by mistake when he struck me over the head with the key he had snatched from me. But his hand is heavy, and the blood gushed from my nose and I fell forward over the table, which in the fall I upset with everything on it. And he was kneeling beside me when I—it can't have lasted long—recovered my senses, and had my head on his knee, and he was saying kind, loving words; but—good Heavens, madam! I was drunk—and I started up in a fury. 'You have struck me; we are quits!' 'Hans, you must stay!' 'I won't!' 'You shall!' Well, madam, I first became sober in Martin's cabin, and we were already ten miles out to sea, and it was too late."

VIII

"And I say and repeat," cried the Assessor in a low, thin, but remarkably clear voice, "I have done and am doing nothing that you would not also have done in my place. The young fellow did not come out of this room alive—that is as clear to me as the sun in the heavens. Where has he remained? Yes, my respected sir, I racked my brains over that for five weeks, until this evening the amazing accusation, which you prefer to call a clumsy mystification, was made. Well, we'll see what there is in it. A corpse isn't thrown into a closet and left there six weeks. Granted, for more than one reason. I don't

believe in the secret passage, either, but I know the arrangement of this house thoroughly, from an old plan of the building which our city architect found in the recorder's office for me. The walls are thick enough to allow a secret dungeon, or something of the sort, behind or under the closet, which I had long suspected. There! the closet must be in that projecting corner by the window. You see how thoroughly I am informed, though I've never been in this room before. And what has become of the sign—the sign that hung under the window until that night, and during that night disappeared?"

"What the devil has that to do with the matter?" cried the doctor.

"I don't know," said the assessor, rubbing his low forehead; "I only know that when I came to Woldom I first learned, to my no small amazement, of the existence of an open shop in this house; that this state of affairs existed at the time Herr Nudel was in Cologne wooing his bride; and I, who, as an intimate friend of the family, was tolerably familiar with everything, never heard the slightest word of allusion to it, and most fortunately for the lover. From what I know of the family, and especially the mother, this little concealed circumstance would have rendered his marriage impossible. The young fellow was his intimate friend; the young fellow and the sign vanished the same night. Really, that rouses very strange thoughts—perfectly new combinations. You are laughing, of course."

"I'm not laughing!" cried the doctor, who was at the other end of the room.

"But somebody laughed here!" said the assessor, who was standing directly in front of the closet.

"Then the devil may have done it!" screamed the doctor.

He did not feel inclined to laugh; he had to struggle with a strong temptation to seize the fiendish man by the throat, like a foaming mad dog which the next instant would bite with its poisonous teeth what was dearest to him on earth. Merciful Heavens! how was this to end? Suppose the

young wife had made no use of the key he had just sent her —suppose she had not understood his mute warning, or had not the courage to obey it. And had he not done his utmost to rob her of this courage? Suppose the horrible man, whose black, piercing eyes seemed to see through the deepest secrets like glass, had found a bloody handkerchief or cap that had belonged to Hans; suppose, as was inevitable, he discovered the fatal sign in the closet, and there—— That was the roll of a carriage rapidly approaching, a roll that became a rattling—past the shaking windows—a stop—they had arrived. The sound of the door-bell, hasty steps along the passage, down the stairs, up the stairs, a confusion of voices—what would be the end?

"I again give you my word," said the assessor in a low tone, approaching the doctor, "that, far from having any personal rancor, I shall show all possible consideration. Whether I can do so will depend upon the young wife's tact and Herr Nudel's conduct. Herr Nudel, you will pardon an old friend of the family in Cologne if he—at the persuasion and on the responsibility of our worthy doctor —ventures to pay his respects to you this evening and make the request to be permitted to take his modest share in the family's festival?"

Lebrecht, who had just entered, cast a hasty, sullen glance at the poor doctor, who was pacing up and down the room with long strides like a madman, but took the hand the assessor offered and said:

"Hospitality, Herr von Frank, is a law as inviolable to us Pomeranians as it can be to you dwellers on the Rhine, so I bid you welcome. My wife has already informed me of your presence. She begs to be excused a few minutes longer until she has greeted her parents. Meantime, will you be seated? Won't you sit down too, Adalbert?"

"Thank you," said the doctor, without interrupting his tramp.

Lebrecht's handsome face betrayed the annoyance that stirred within him. No human being's presence would have been more unwelcome to him at this moment than the

assessor's. On the way to the station, in the dark corner of his carriage, with the memory of every warning word his friend had spoken, the sorrowful glance his unsuspicious Annchen had cast at him, as he went out of the door, the whole folly of the situation into which he had plunged himself became clear, and in the same moment a resolution had become fixed in his soul. He would, not to Annchen alone, not to her parents alone, but when they were together, and in the presence of Bertram, whose esteem he valued more than that of all other human beings except Annchen—he would say to them, "It happened so-and-so. Now do what you wish and can." What would the parents, Annchen herself, do and say? He bowed his head in sincere humility. In his own opinion he had deserved any punishment—nay, asked himself whether he even dared to wish that he might not receive the most severe chastisement—whether if he did not, he should ever again have peace from the reproaches of his own conscience. How he should bear it he had under no circumstances to ask.

And now a malicious fate must throw this man in his way —this man, to whom from the first moment he had felt a deep, unconquerable repugnance, of whose malicious wit he had had proofs enough, of whose hostility towards himself, even without direct proofs, he was secretly convinced, and who in the eyes of Annchen's parents certainly—and who could tell whether not also in hers? for he was undoubtedly a clever man and had been able to exert his influence over her when she was still almost a child—stood in high and, if people chose to consider it, just esteem. It had already affected him most unpleasantly when Bertram said that the man was in Woldom, and now he sat opposite to him by his own fireside—sat there as if in mockery of him, in the very chair from which he had just wished his faithful, beloved old friend a thousand miles away! Or was it only a righteous sharpening of the punishment? Must what he had not ventured to say to the friend now be confessed in the presence of that friend, Annchen's parents, and this man? Very well; he had determined that no pun-

ishment would be too hard; a harder one than this no malicious fiend could have invented.

While such sad, nay, cheerless emotions filled poor silent Lebrecht's soul and reflected themselves in his gloomy face, and Herr von Frank, with the most unconcerned expression and perfect politeness, chatted about Cologne and Woldom, and this and that, Dr. Bertram, during his promenade, had had time to watch the strange pair by the fireside. Was that his friend in conversation with a new acquaintance? Was it a poor fly in the web of a spider that cautiously pulls the thread to show how great its victim's power of resistance will be—a stupid devil of a traveler, who pursues his way while the robber aims his gun at him from behind a tree —a man who, before he puts down the poker with which he has just stirred the coals, falls dead with palpitation of the heart? Yes, palpitation of the heart, if she did not aid in the dangers that threatened him on all sides—she of whom the young men—where could they be now?—would sing that evening:

> "The pure, the innocent, the fair,
> His comfort sweet, his help and stay."

Hear me, Father Apollo! I'll never again sin against you by sweet verses, if you'll make me your prophet this time.

So the singular man prayed, while wiping the sweat of anxiety from his brow with his yellow silk handkerchief, and then in the act of turning, in an attitude only possible to his figure, stood motionless, handkerchief in hand. Through the door leading into the entry, which Nebelow had just thrown open, entered a handsome old gentleman in a black coat, with a most conspicuous double chin between the points of a high, stiff collar, supporting on his arm a tall, corpulent lady in a black silk dress, whose most prominent feature was an imperious nose under heavy, black, straight eyebrows. And between the black shoulders of this worthy couple the doctor saw a beautiful face, which he alone sought, and which, while the black shoulders swayed to the

right and left, remained a moment in the frame of the doorway and cast a glance at him from the large, sparkling eyes—a single glance, accompanied by the sweetest, most mischievous smile; and all in the room, the assessor not excepted, were startled by a strange sound, half like the cry of a human being, half like the crow of a hen, which the doctor had undoubtedly uttered, though he now stepped forward, with the gravest face, to meet the Herr and Frau Commerzienrath and claim for himself, in well-chosen words, the right to be permitted to introduce himself as Lebrecht's oldest and best friend. Ere two minutes had passed the most animated conversation, in which Lebrecht alone took no share, was going on among the party gathered round the hearth. What did he care for Herr von Frank's reminiscences of the dear, hospitable house in the holy city, his mother-in-law's gracious answers, his father-in-law's stories of the events of the present journey, and how he had manfully struggled with hunger and thirst in order not to spoil his appetite for supper, inclusive of the king's bowl? What did he care for Bertram's wit, which played the maddest pranks, and had repeatedly made Annchen's kind old father almost go into convulsions of laughter, to which the doctor was once obliged to put an end by gently rapping him between the black shoulders? His eyes, when he ventured to raise them, sought only her face, which had never seemed to him so beautiful, so radiant with mirth—a mirth which, alas! formed a contrast with the weary sadness of the past hours very humiliating to him. And why had she, in the hurry, put on the gray silk dress of which he was so fond, because he saw her in it for the first time, except in order, by every circumstance, to remind him of the priceless treasure he had once possessed and was now in the act of losing forever? How her laugh would die away—the laugh that, rising from time to time with silvery clearness above the hum of conversation, fell with painful sweetness upon his ear! How at every word he uttered the sunny smile would vanish more and more from her face; and yet they must be spoken!

"My honored friends, will you allow me to say a few words——"

"On no account," interrupted the doctor, who, in spite of the jests he was making, constantly maintained a sharp watch. "He wants to make a speech; don't allow it, madam."

"Certainly not!" cried Annchen, hastily turning from an apparently eager conversation with the assessor, "except at the table. I'm very fond of speeches at table. Papa is great in them. Yes, yes, papa! you are. Our Herr Assessor, you must know, doctor, is famed along the Rhine for his toasts, and deserves it. From you, my dear doctor, after the lecture you've already given me to-day, I expect something magnificent. And, Lebrecht, you must speak too —really, whether you want to or not. I've invited your clerks—I wonder they're not here yet—all of them, even the young men from our shop. Yes, yes, mamma; we have a shop, too—a real shop for provisions and colonial wares, which has already been in the family I don't know how long, and in which one can get everything that is wanted in the kitchen. I must say I haven't been so much delighted with the whole magnificent old house as with my shop; for you must know, mamma, that on our betrothal Lebrecht gave me the income for pocket-money—several thousand thalers a year, mamma. We wanted to surprise you, and even had the old sign under the window taken down; but I'm too proud of my shop—it had to be put back immediately. Didn't you see it in the dark after all? And, papa, the sugar and oranges for the king's bowl all came from my shop. But, mamma, what will, perhaps, interest you still more is that we have a skeleton in the house too, and a skeleton in the house, you know, is the most genteel and aristocratic thing in the world; for a skeleton only appears in very old and aristocratic houses, and every aristocratic old house must have its skeleton. Our doctor here understands the whole—don't you call it pathology, doctor?—of skeletons, and that there are chronic and acute ones, but the chronic are the genuine, and ours is a genuine chronic one.

Oh! he has made me so curious about our skeleton, but I couldn't do anything, for Lebrecht had the key to the old closet yonder, where it is, in his trunk, and I was obliged to wait until the baggage came. So, to the despair of Frau Uelzen, I've been till this moment without our silver, which is also in the closet, together with the king's bowl, dear papa; and, Lebrecht, it is high time for us to go to supper. The skeleton will of course eat with us. You needn't be at all afraid of it, mamma; there were certainly plenty of skeletons in our fifty castles, and the Herr Assessor will be so pleased to make its acquaintance. You also belong to an old family, Herr von Frank, and I know you are enthusiastic on the subject of skeletons, especially ours. Here is the key, Lebrecht."

A crimson flush had suffused Lebrecht's face from the moment Annchen's smiling lips uttered the fatal word. There was no time for him even to form a conjecture whether Bertram had betrayed him, or how she had obtained the key; and, besides, it was a matter of indifference. He knew, he felt, only one thing: your repentance, your atonement—all too late, too late! He could have died of shame at the feet of the enchantress, who, smiling sweetly, was loosening in careless, sportive play, with light, gentle hand, the heavy fetters in which his folly, his pitiful disbelief in the infinitude of her love and kindness, had ensnared him.

And while, a weak, shamefaced man, he still gazed at the undeserved miracle, what new flood of light was this that now almost dazzled his eyes? Could it be? Her previous sadness, her exuberant mirth now, Bertram's allusions, the assessor's inexplicable presence, the policeman who had followed him everywhere at the station—she had known, endured, been silent about this too, she whom he had not thought generous enough to forgive a trifle!

The strong man almost broke down under the flood of happiness that overwhelmed him. He staggered up from his seat like a drunkard, rushed to the closet, and tore open the door.

"Hans!"

Hans had darted out of the darkness into the outstretched arms of his beloved master so quickly that they scarcely knew whether he had come from the closet or sprung from the floor. In the haste it had been impossible, even for Annchen's mother, to utter the smallest cry of surprise or terror, while the two men, amid flowing tears, embraced each other again and again, and shook hands like brothers who had met after the pain of a long and sorrowful separation.

Hans first released himself, wiped the tears from his laughing eyes, bowed gracefully, and said, "I beg pardon, Herr and Frau Commerzienrath. My name is Hans Fliederbusch, fourth clerk in your son-in-law's counting-house. Herr Assessor von Frank, I'm extremely happy to make your valuable acquaintance. You must excuse my emotion and my somewhat reduced condition, ladies and gentlemen. It's no joke to be shut up here in the dark for six weeks, and have no amusement except a nocturnal promenade through the secret passage to Gallows Hill and a game of sixty-six with the slave-ship captains there. And as soon as I had no more ready cash the rascals took from me all our silver piece by piece, except the king's bowl, Herr Commerzienrath, which you see glittering there alone, that I wouldn't give up on any account; and—can you conceive of such avarice, Herr Assessor?—finally they even took my boots."

"*Mauvais sujet!*" cried the doctor, "will you never listen to reason? This, you must know, Herr Commerzienrath—allow me, Herr Commerzienrath!"

And the doctor gently patted the black shoulders of the Commerzienrath, who at all the jokes, of which he did not understand a word, and the comical people who seemed as if they had sprung out of a carnival, was choking with laughter again, and then drew him aside, whispering a few explanatory words about these jests, while Hans rushed across the entry into the dining-room, from whence he heard various shrill and growling tones that seemed trying to pitch themselves on A.

"For God's sake, dear Herr Assessor, what does all this mean?" whispered Frau Commerzienräthen Schmitz to the assessor, who raised himself on the toes of his varnished boots and whispered in reply:

"It means, madam, that you have a very clever daughter, and people must get up early in the morning to obtain their revenge."

But Annchen held her husband in a close embrace, as if she would never release him from her arms.

"Forgive me, Lebrecht!"

"I forgive you?"

"You made me almost crazy, Lebrecht."

"I—I—fool, madman! Annchen, Annchen! henceforth I must live by your favor."

"By my love, Lebrecht, as I by yours. Isn't that so, doctor, you dear, dear friend?"

The doctor, who was just passing them, passionately kissed the hand offered him, exclaiming:

"I don't know what you have been talking about, I only know that there are still angels, and only the poet's eye has the favor of beholding them; and my eye beheld this angel, when, on the day after your departure, I sat in my dark corner at Mother Ihlefeldt's, and, in compensation for your having left me, and that I should henceforth be more lonely than ever before, wished you the best of wives."

The assessor had vanished.

"A pity!" muttered the doctor, putting on his glasses again; "he's a clever fellow, who would have made a thousand jokes this evening, when it will doubtless be uncommonly gay. And as for the others—dear me! he doesn't suspect how good-natured and forgiving people are who have successfully driven their skeleton out of the house."

PART II

Short Stories

Short Stories

Gustav Meyrink

The Man on the Bottle

MELANCHTHON was dancing with the Bat, whose costume represented her in an inverted position. The wings were folded close to the body, and in the claws she held a large gold hoop upright, which gave the impression that she was hanging, suspended from some imaginary point. The effect was grotesque, and it amused Melanchthon very much, for he had to peep through this gold hoop, which was exactly on a level with his face, while dancing with the Bat.

She was one of the most original masks—and at the same time one of the most repelling ones—at the fête of the Persian prince. She had even impressed his highness, Mohammed Darasche-Koh, the host.

"I know you, pretty one," he had nodded to her, much to the amusement of the bystanders.

"It is certainly the little marquise, the intimate friend of the princess," declared a Dutch councilor in a Rembrandt costume. He surmised this because she knew every turn and corner of the palace, to judge by her conversation. And but a few moments ago, when some cavalier had ordered felt boots and torches so that they might go down into the courtyard and indulge in snowballing, the Bat joined them and participated wildly in the game. It was then—and the Dutchman was quite ready to back it with

a wager—that he had seen a well-known bracelet on her wrist.

"Oh, how interesting," exclaimed a Blue Butterfly. "Couldn't Melanchthon discreetly discover whether or not Count Faast is a slave of the princess?"

"Don't speak so loud," interrupted the Dutch councilor. "It is a mighty good thing that the orchestra played the close of that waltz *fortissimo*, for the prince was standing here only a moment since."

"Better not speak of such things," whispered an Egyptian, "for the jealousy of this Asiatic prince knows no bounds, and there are probably more explosives in the palace than we dream. Count de Faast has been playing with fire too long, and if Darasche-Koh suspects——"

A rough figure representing a huge knot dashed by them in wild flight to escape a Hellenic warrior in shimmering armor.

"If you were the Gordian knot, Mynherr, and were pursued by Alexander the Great, wouldn't you be frightened?" teased the inverted Bat, tapping the Dutchman coquettishly on the end of the nose with her fan.

"The sharp wit of the pretty Marquise Bat betrays her," smiled a lanky Satan with tail and cloven foot. "What a pity that only as a Bat are you to be seen with your feet in the air."

The dull sound of a gong filled the room as an executioner appeared, draped in a crimson robe. He tapped a bronze gong, and then, resting his weight on his glittering cudgel, posed himself in the center of the big hall.

Out of every niche and lobby the maskers streamed toward him—harlequins, cannibals, an ibis, and some Chinese, Don Quixotes, Columbines, bayaderes and dominoes of all colors.

The crimson executioner distributed tablets of ivory inscribed with gold letters.

"Oh, programmes for the entertainment!" chorused the crowd.

THE MAN IN THE BOTTLE

Marionette Comedy in the Spirit of Aubrey Beardsley

By Prince Mohammed Darasche-Koh

Characters:

The Man in the Bottle.....Miguel, Count de Faast
The Man on the Bottle.....Prince Mohammed Darasche-Koh
The Lady in the Sedan Chair.....———

Vampires, Marionettes, Hunchbacks, Apes, Musicians

Scene of Action: A Tiger's Maw

"What! The prince the author of this marionette play?"

"Probably a scene out of the 'Thousand and One Nights.'"

"But who will play the part of the Lady in the Sedan Chair?"

"Oh, there is a great surprise in store for us," twittered a seductive Incroyable, leaning on the arm of an Abbé. "Do you know, the Pierrot with whom I danced the tarantelle was the Count de Faast, who is going to play The Man in the Bottle; and he confided a lot of things to me: the marionettes will be very grewsome—that is, for those who appreciate the spirit of the thing—and the prince had an elephant sent down from Hamburg—but you are not listening to me at all!" And the little one dropped the arm of her escort and bolted into the swirling crowd.

New groups of masks constantly poured out of the adjoining rooms through the wide doorways into the big hall, making a kaleidoscopic play of colors, while files of costumed guests stood admiring the wonderful mural frescoes that rose to the blue, star-dotted ceiling. Attendants served refreshments, sorbets and wines in the window niches.

With a rolling sound the walls of the narrow end of the hall separated and a stage was pushed slowly into view. Its setting, in red brown and a flaming yellow proscenium,

was a yawning tiger's maw, the white teeth glittering above and below.

In the middle of the scene stood a huge glass bottle in the form of a globe, with walls at least a foot thick. It was about twice the height of an average man and very roomy. The back of the scene was draped with pink silk hangings.

Then the colossal ebony doors of the hall opened and admitted a richly caparisoned elephant, which advanced with majestic tread. On its head sat the crimson executioner guiding the beast with the butt of his cudgel. Chains of amethysts dangled from the elephant's tusks, and plumes of peacock feathers nodded from its head. Heavily embroidered gold cloths streamed down from the back of the beast, skirting the floor; across its enormous forehead there was a network of sparkling jewels.

The maskers flocked around the advancing beast, shouting greetings to the gay group of actors seated in the palanquin; Prince Darasche-Koh with turban and aigrette, Count de Faast as Pierrot, marionettes and musicians, stiff as wooden puppets. The elephant reached the stage, and with its trunk lifted one man after another from its back. There was much applause and a yell of delight as the beast seized the Pierrot and sliding him into the neck of the bottle, closed the metal top. Then the Persian prince was placed on top of the bottle.

The musicians seated themselves in a semicircle, drawing forth strange, slender instruments. The elephant gazed at them a moment, then turned about and strode toward the door. Like a lot of happy children the maskers clung to its trunk, ears, and tusks and tried to hold it back; but the animal seemed not to feel their weight at all.

The performance began, and somewhere, as if out of the ground, there arose weird music. The puppet orchestra of marionettes remained lifeless and waxen; the flute player stared with glassy, idiotic eyes at the ceiling; the features of the rococo conductor in peruke and plumed hat, holding the baton aloft and pressing a pointed finger mysteriously

to his lips, were distorted by a shrewd, uncanny smile. In the foreground posed the marionettes. Here were grouped a humpbacked dwarf with chalky face, a gray, grinning devil, and a sallow, rouged actress with carmine lips. The three seemed possessed of some satanic secret that had paralyzed their movements. The semblance of death brooded over the entire motionless group.

The Pierrot in the bottle now began to move restlessly. He doffed his white felt hat, bowed and occasionally greeted the Persian prince, who with crossed legs sat on the cap of the bottle. His antics amused the audience. The thick walls of glass distorted his appearance curiously; sometimes his eyes seemed to pop out of his head; then again they disappeared, and one saw only forehead and chin; sometimes he was fat and bloated, then again slender, with long legs like a spider's.

In the midst of a motionless pause the red silk hangings of the background parted, and a closed sedan chair was carried on by two Moors, who placed it near the bottle. A ray of pale light from above now illuminated the scene. The spectators had formed themselves into two camps. The one was speechless under the spell of this vampiric, enigmatic marionette play that seemed to exhale an atmosphere of poisoned merriment; the other group, not sensitive enough to appreciate such a scene, laughed immoderately at the comical capering of the man in the bottle. He had given up his merry dancing and was trying by every possible means to impart some information or other to the prince sitting on the cap. He pounded the walls of the bottle as though he would smash them; and to all appearances he was screaming at the top of his voice, although not the slightest sound penetrated the thick glass.

The Persian prince acknowledged the movements of the Pierrot with a smile, pointing with his finger at the sedan chair.

The curiosity of the audience reached its climax when it saw that the Pierrot had pressed his face against the glass and was staring at something in the window of the sedan

chair. Then suddenly, like one gone mad, he beat his face with his hands, sank on his knees and tore his hair. Then he sprang furiously up and raced around the bottle at such speed that the audience saw only a fluttering cloth in his wake.

The secret of the Lady in the Sedan Chair puzzled the audience considerably—they could only see that a white face was pressed against the window of the chair and was staring over at the bottle. Shadows cut off all further view.

Laughter and applause rose to a tumult. Pierrot had crouched on the bottom of the bottle, his fingers clutching his throat. Then he opened his mouth wide and pointed in wild frenzy to his chest and then to the one sitting above. He folded his hands in supplication, as though he were begging something from the audience.

"He wants something to drink! Such a large bottle and no wine in it? I say, you marionettes, give him a drink," cried one of the maskers.

Everybody laughed and applauded.

Then the Pierrot jumped up once more, tore his garments from his chest and staggered about until he measured his length on the bottom of the bottle.

"Bravo, bravo, Pierrot! Wonderfully acted! *Da capo, da capo!*" yelled the maskers.

When the man in the bottle did not stir again and made no effort to repeat his scene, the applause gradually subsided and the attention of the spectators was drawn to the marionettes. They still remained motionless in the poses they had assumed, but in their miens there was now a sense of expectancy that had not been there before. It seemed as if they were waiting for a cue.

The humpbacked dwarf, with the chalked face, turned his eyes carefully and gazed at the Prince Darasche-Koh. The Persian did not stir.

Finally two figures advanced from the background, and one of the Moors haltingly approached the sedan chair and opened the door.

And then something very remarkable occurred—the body

of a woman fell stiffly out on the stage. There was a moment of deathly silence and then a thousand voices arose: "What has happened?"

Marionettes, apes, musicians—all leaped forward; maskers climbed up on the stage.

The princess, wife of Darasche-Koh, lay there strapped to a steel frame. Where the ropes had cut into her flesh were blue bruises, and in her mouth there was a silk gag.

A nameless horror took possession of the audience.

"Pierrot!" a voice suddenly shrilled. "Pierrot!" Like a dagger, indescribable fear penetrated every heart.

"Where is the prince?"

During the tumult the Persian had disappeared.

Melanchthon stood on the shoulders of Mephisto, but he could not lift the cap of the bottle, and the air valve was screwed tightly shut.

"Break the walls of the bottle! Quick!"

The Dutch councilor tore the cudgel from the hand of the crimson executioner and with a leap landed on the stage.

A grewsome sound arose, like the tolling of a cracked bell. Like streaks of white lightning the cracks leaped across the surface of the glass. Finally the bottle was splintered into bits. And within lay, suffocated, the corpse of the Count de Faast, his fingers clawing his breast.

Silently and with invisible pinions the gigantic ebon birds of terror streaked through the hall of the fête.

Dietrich Theden

Christian Lahusen's Baron

FROM the beginning the villagers said that there was something queer about the Baron, "Farmer Christian's Baron," as they called him. Of course, even the most inveterate gossips of the neighborhood didn't expect things to turn out just as they did. But the gossips enjoyed themselves because of the outcome, which enlivened many a long winter evening for them. They were sorry for Christian, of course, but they said it did him good. And then he was a rich man, and could stand a lesson even if it did cost him quite a pretty sum.

Christian Lahusen, owner of the Sea Inn, was a man whose carriage and bearing, one might say his whole attitude toward life, showed that his bank account was of a satisfactory heaviness, and that his land was good land which repaid his labor and his confidence.

The Lake Inn farm belonged to the wealthy village of Brügghofen, near Kiel. The farm itself was of considerable size, with good rich loam and a fine beach wood surrounding a pretty little lake from which the inn took its name. Agriculture and the fishing in the lake were not the only occupation of the owner of the farm. His many-sided energy allowed him to give sufficient attention to an eating and drinking establishment in one wing of this house, and not to neglect over it a general store at the opposite end of the large building. Besides the favorite lager beer which he ordered from Kiel, he brewed a beer on his own grounds which was eagerly consumed by all the neighborhood, and also sold in considerable quantities to other inns in the vicinity. A large metal shield with golden letters on a black ground told all who might be interested that Chris-

tian was also the general agent of a large fire insurance company, and his customers comprised almost the entire landed population of the district. But more important than any of these was his wholesale fruit trade, which made his name known far beyond the boundaries of his own county. Christian Lahusen was the first farmer who had utilized the railroad for the service of his business. He bought up the entire fruit output for many square miles and sent whole carloads to Kiel and Hamburg. The fruit growers of the neighborhood, even the owners of the large baronial estates, brought all their produce to Christian, and he numbered the largest shops of the cities among his customers.

All this naturally made Christian a marked man among his fellows, and a man universally respected for his energy and his success. But, like everyone else, he had his failings. One particular little fancy of his was the cause of great amusement to the entire neighborhood,—of amusement that turned to distrust and led to many a well-meant warning. But these warnings passed all unheeded, and Christian brought his trouble upon himself.

The owner of the Lake Inn farm had two daughters, and he had great hopes and schemes for them. The youngest, Marie, was still only fourteen years old, and was a pupil in a leading boarding school in Kiel. From this school the elder sister, Dorothea, had just returned as a maiden of seventeen. For a few weeks before this story opens, Dorothea had been visiting her sister in Kiel, and had made an aristocratic acquaintance who is the hero of this serio-comic tale. This gentleman had evidently become so interested in Dorothea that he followed her home and took a room at the inn for an indefinite length of time. Christian Lahusen introduced him to the daily guests as Baron Herbert von Waregg, pronouncing the name as if it gave him the greatest pleasure. The Baron was polite enough whenever he would condescend to depart from his usual elegant reserve and make the acquaintance of the peasants of the neighborhood. But, somehow, the villagers did not seem to take to the Baron, and they laughed at Christian

for his folly, the best natured of them saying that they hoped at least that his fancy for the aristocracy would not cost him all too dear. They did not know quite how well justified their distrust turned out to be.

The Baron had a large amount of baggage with him and dressed in the latest style. He wore easy morning clothes of the most fashionable cut during the week, and honored the Sunday by shining patent-leather boots, pale-gray trousers, a long black frock coat and a most carefully brushed silk hat, which he wore just a little over one eye. When he walked through the village streets or on the shores of the lake in all this elegance, he was the cause of great excitement among the small boys of the neighborhood. The village girls appeared to look upon him with favor, which naturally increased the dislike of the men of the neighborhood.

The tall hat made the Baron look even longer than he was, and lengthened his narrow face in a rather disadvantageous manner. His guest's height would make even Lahusen smile, when the former was obliged to bow his head considerably to pass in under the somewhat low door of the inn. "I'll have to send for the carpenter to raise the top of that door," laughed the landlord. But his peasant friends told him that they didn't think it was necessary. "It won't hurt the Baron—or whatever he may be—to have to make a bow to a decent farmer occasionally," said one of them.

"It is not so much his height I'm worrying about," said another. "He can carry it all, for he stands up as stiff as a ramrod. But it's his face I don't like. I can't say what it is, but there's something in it that makes me think I wouldn't trust the man."

"What's in it?" said the third. "Why, nothing but a nose like a hawk and eyes like a cat——"

Christian Lahusen rattled the glasses at his bar in a noticeable way, as a delicate hint that he did not like the conversation.

The peasants were not so far out of the way with their description of "hawk's nose and cat's eyes." But in spite of this, the Baron's face was not altogether unpleasing, and was certainly not uninteresting. It would light up well when he was talking to his landlord, and he could then show an amiability which quite charmed the farmer, and make him think that the distrust shown by his friends in the village sprang from their lack of understanding a gentleman of the great world. He paid no further attention to their remarks, but merely shrugged his shoulders. One thing did worry him, however, and that was his daughter's attitude toward the Baron.

Dorothea Lahusen was a typical Holstein girl in appearance; above middle height, slender but well developed, bloomingly healthy, with rich blond hair and clear frank blue eyes. Her character also showed all the good qualities of her countrywomen. She was capable and energetic, efficient in the ordering of her house, neat and tidy, straightforward and honest in her loyal devotion to her family and in her reserve toward strangers. Her boarding-school education in the city had given her somewhat easier manners than those of country girls generally. It had awakened her intelligence and raised her from the plane of her friends at home, thus seeming to heighten her reserve toward them, and to give to her attitude toward the Baron the politeness of maidenly modesty. She had met the gentleman at the house of a friend in the city, and at the various parties and excursions that had brought them together, he had noticeably shown his preference for her. His attentions had flattered her, although she did not feel herself drawn toward him in the slightest. She had accepted the bouquet which he brought to the train on her departure simply to show her gratitude for his preference. But she had been much astonished when he appeared at the inn and engaged a room for a prolonged stay.

Several months had passed and Waregg was still there. He had entirely won the father's confidence, and went in and out as if he were a member of the family. But he did

not seem to have made any advance in Dorothea's favor. The girl talked to him as to anyone else at the table, but she evidently avoided being alone with him. She could not have explained what it was that warned her to be cautious and not to encourage his suit. Nor could she have told what it was that affected her unpleasantly, when he would wander into the store in the busy early evening hours to help her father and to chat with the customers.

"Looking for change?" he asked once, as Dorothea could not seem to find the money she looked for, and was about to send out the errand boy. "Please permit me." Waregg brought out a handful of change from his pocket, counted it out, and said, laughing, "Don't you want to make me your banker? I won't ask any commission."

The next evening he was there again. The store was full, and Lahusen as well as his daughter had as much as they could do.

"Want some help?" asked the Baron amiably. "I'm a trained cashier; can't I help you a little, my dear friend?"

Christian Lahusen was very glad of the assistance, and gave the Baron the entire charge of the cash, turning the money over to him with simply a mention of the sum to be returned, and then going right on to the next customer himself. Dorothea did not like this, but she did not want to show her distrust and so followed her father's example. The Baron was quick and adept at his work, said laughingly that he was glad he was of some use in the world, and remained in the store as long as they did. His daily assistance came to be a matter of habit. There was but one disadvantage, if one can call it that, about this new arrangement. The women customers, finding that the Baron was there every evening, appeared to prefer those hours for their errands, and the room was often so crowded that it was impossible to move sometimes. Waregg appeared much amused at this, and exchanged jokes with his landlord about it.

Punctually every Saturday evening the Baron paid his weekly bill. This was not a very large one, and was in-

creased only on the rare occasions when the Baron allowed himself a good bottle of wine.

"He must have *some* money," acknowledged even Detlev Bruhn, who had been the first and worst to talk against the Baron.

"He? He has more money than you and I together, Detlev," declared Lahusen.

"Has he spoken to you about his affairs?" asked the other.

"Why, of course."

"What part of the country does he come from?"

"From Austria, if you must know."

"Oh!—and what is his father?"

"His father—his father is a bank president, and has a big estate besides. He showed me a picture of the castle—it's fine, I tell you."

"Has he got the picture with him?"

"Yes—that is, he sent for it."

"Hm! Has he sent for money, much?"

"For these few months? A man like that doesn't go round with a few groschen in his pocket. Besides, he doesn't need much here. He'd use more in one week in the city than he would here in four months. Why, he's saving money now!"

"Will he—will he stay much longer?" asked Detlev.

This was his way of avoiding the direct question which the entire village was asking itself, "Will he ask for your daughter's hand?"

"We'll see soon, I suppose," answered Lahusen evasively.

"He—hasn't got a profession, I suppose?" continued Bruhn.

"He studied at college—the law, I think. In Vienna and Berlin. People like that, Detlev, can arrange their vacation just as they like. They don't need to earn money, 'cause they have more than they can spend, anyway."

"'Twould make me lazy—I'd want something to do."

"Yes, *you* might, Detlev. And I would, too, but there's

all sorts of people in this world. And, besides, he isn't quite lazy even here. In the store evenings, for instance, he takes entire charge of the money. You ought to see how he can work."

"Indeed?" asked Detlev Bruhn, with a long-drawn tone.

Lahusen poured out a fresh glass of beer. "Prost, Detlev!"

"Prost, Christian! you made a good thing out of this year's plums, didn't you?"

"I'm satisfied."

. . . . . .

Toward the end of September Waregg went to Kiel for a day, returning in time to help Lahusen with his accounting after the close of the apple trade. Combined with the payment for a large order from a big Hamburg house, the amounts that came in reached a considerable height.

"Don't you think we'll make up that last twenty thousand?" joked the Baron. "I really shouldn't have thought that a few carloads of apples——"

Lahusen interrupted with a laugh. "Would run up such a capital, hey? Well, I suppose you have different sums to calculate with than we do."

"Yes, at least my old man does. He strings on a few ciphers on general principles before he begins to add up. But as far as I'm concerned, I respect the smallest sum when I see it's honestly worked for. But your business is worthy of respect anyway. This Hamburg firm, for instance—let me see—it's No. 60 or 70 Graskeller, isn't it?—yes, Heinrich Kruse, that's the name on the draft. Are they secure?"

"As certain as death. They complain now and then and want to cut down a little, but they are honest as gold."

"Hm, you see I don't know much about that sort of thing. And it's a draft on sight, too, no loss of interest. Now that we're here alone, my dear Lahusen, won't you shut your book a moment, and allow me a discreet question?"

"Certainly." Christian Lahusen knew what was com-

ing. At least, he thought he did, and his fresh round face flushed.

Waregg came to the point at once. "I suppose you know what's keeping me here? Will you give me your daughter for my wife?"

"Have you spoken to her?" asked Lahusen, hesitating.

"No, I wish to be quite correct and to secure your consent first."

Lahusen stood up. "If my daughter wants you, I have nothing against it."

"I will speak to her myself."

"Yes, I will leave that to you."

"She is busy in the house now. But late in the afternoon when she is free, I will find her. It can hardly surprise her by this time."

Lahusen pressed his guest's hand. "Yes, speak to her then," he said.

So he really meant business; he thought in triumph. What a sensation it would make in the village! and what a defeat for the gossips and the backbiters! Lahusen mopped his brow with his handkerchief, put his books and his accounts in his iron safe, hurried through his house and garden and couldn't seem to await the afternoon. During the day, however, a young friend of Dorothea's came to take her away to a birthday party, which rather upset the plans of the men of the household and put them in a bad humor. During the early evening, when there was so much business in the store, there was no possibility of a quiet conversation. The Baron didn't come to take care of the cash that evening, but promenaded the garden, instead, with a very melancholy expression of face.

Finally, after supper, the balmy air drew Dorothea to the garden, and she wandered out to a little arbor with a romantic outlook on the lake and the woods beyond. It was a charming evening, with the delicate light of the early moon over wood and water, and the young girl hummed a song gently as she sat there alone.

In the deep silence she was startled by steps approach-

ing the arbor. She recognized the Baron and left her little nook, as she did not wish to be alone with him in any place so secluded.

She answered his greetings with reserve.

"May I speak to you for a moment?" Waregg began.

She nodded and walked slowly through the garden path, while he followed at her side.

"Miss Dorothea, I have followed you ever since I first met you. Must I tell you why I am here?"

She halted and turned to look at him.

"I *will* tell you then," he said. "I love you, Dorothea; will you be my wife?"

She was surprised at the calmness with which she heard his words, particularly as the moonlight streaming over his face brought out its peculiarities more clearly than she had ever seen them before. It looked yellow, deepened in spots where the smooth-shaven black beard gleamed through the skin. The turned-up corners of the mustache had an artificial appearance; fine lines that years alone can bring were gathered about the corners of his eyes, and his glance had a glowing keenness that frightened her.

She shook her blond head. "No," she said; "I thank you for the honor you have done me, but I cannot accept."

He paused for a moment, then answered calmly, with a sharp glance at her: "Forgive me, if I ventured to hope too much. I had your father's consent. But if I cannot win yours, I will leave this place at once." He bowed formally and ceremoniously. "I will take the noon train tomorrow and may therefore have no further opportunity to see you. Farewell, Miss Lahusen."

She bowed without speaking and breathed a deep sigh of relief as he walked quickly toward the house and left her alone with the peace of the evening. She saw no more of the Baron that evening. When she had remained about an hour more in the garden she went quietly upstairs to her own room without going to see her father as usual. She was still awake when, at eleven o'clock, the last guests left the inn room, and shortly after that she heard her father

come upstairs. She heard midnight strike from the deep-toned church clock of Brügghofen, then her eyes closed in the deep healthy sleep of youth.

. . . . .

Lahusen was usually the first up in the morning, awakening his daughter and the rest of the household force by knocking on their doors. The morning following Dorothea's refusal of Waregg, Lahusen started up uneasily from his bed, as it seemed to him that he heard a loud knocking at the window of the inn room which looked out upon the main street. He looked at his clock, saw that it was only five o'clock and listened again. There it was, beyond a doubt this time. "Well, that *is* early," he said, sprang out of bed, and drew his clothes on hastily.

Five o'clock was the usual rising hour at the farm in summer, but for several weeks now the winter hour of six o'clock had been introduced. Even the early drovers did not come before six. Who could it possibly be?

Bum—bum—bum—there it was again, at the window of the inn room. Lahusen opened his own window and called out, "Yes, yes, one moment." He finished his toilet in haste and hurried down to welcome the early guest.

A broad-shouldered stranger with a dark gray overcoat and a stiff black hat stood before him as he opened the door. "Good morning. Is this Mr. Lahusen?"

"Yes, I am he."

"I beg your pardon for coming so early. My name is Groth. Police Commissioner from Kiel."

"Who? what?" asked the landlord, surprised.

The Commissioner pointed to a little shield under his overcoat and continued, "I come on official business; may I speak to you alone?"

Lahusen led the way to the room in surprise. "You come on business? To me?" he asked as if in doubt.

The stranger took a portfolio from his pocket, searched among the papers it contained, took one out, read it and asked, "Is there a Baron Herbert von Waregg living here?"

"Waregg?" stammered Lahusen astounded.

"Herbert von Waregg, as he calls himself."

"Calls himself?"

"Will you please answer my question? Does the gentleman live here?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Is he still in the house?"

"Why, yes, in his room."

The Commissioner smiled. "That's good. I was afraid the bird might have flown. I have an order here to arrest the Baron."

"What? Arrest him?"

"I'm very sorry that I have to thus disturb you, and I am sorry also to have to tell you that you have fallen into the hands of a swindler."

"A swindler? Oh, impossible!" cried Lahusen in excitement.

The official showed him the warrant, but the letters danced before Lahusen's eyes. He could only make out the official heading and the words "Warrant for Arrest," then a strange name, "Thomas Gliczek," and beside it in brackets, "Baron Herbert von Waregg, also Lieutenant Thomas von Böwegg," and then finally the signature "District Attorney Rüttgers."

Yes, he knew that last name. The man was the brother of a landed proprietor who was one of his customers. And this representative of justice was on the heels of his Baron, and this Baron von Waregg was only Thomas Gliczek and a common swindler! Lahusen groaned, and it was some time before he could control himself. But then he pulled himself together and told the official to do his duty. "Come with me." He crossed a narrow corridor between the inn room and the store and pointed to a staircase which led to the second story.

"Lead the way, please," said the official. "But be careful that the stairs do not creak."

They tiptoed past several doors until Lahusen stopped before one of them, to which he pointed. The Commis-

sioner turned the knob gently and found that the door was locked. He took an instrument from his pocket and opened it noiselessly. They stepped inside, but the bed was empty. The trunks still stood in the room, several suits and coats hung in the wardrobe, and a half-opened drawer was full of underwear. The bed had not been used at all.

The official turned to Lahusen. "Did the man have other rooms?" he said, evidently in a bad humor.

"No, only this one, the largest in the house."

The Commissioner stepped to the window. "Aha!" he exclaimed, "he has escaped us after all." He drew up a heavy rope which was fastened to the window sill and hung down nearly to the ground. "You see the path he has taken. That sort of man has a fine sense of danger and generally gets out in time. Do you know whether he received a telegram last night?"

"Not that I know of."

"We got wind of him yesterday in Kiel through a woman he lived with." (Lahusen gasped at this.) "A Polish woman, very ordinary sort," continued the Commissioner. "He has neglected her since the beginning of the summer, and that made her very angry. He came back to her day before yesterday, brought her money, and told her that he would send her some regularly from now on, from here. The woman believed that he was deceiving her and she betrayed him to the police. In this way we found out where he was, but too late again. Well, it wasn't my knocking that frightened him, for he has not been to bed this night and probably left here in the late evening. You see, he shut the door carefully that his flight would not be discovered until as late as possible. I suppose he told you all sorts of things about himself, and—was he in your debt also?"

Christian Lahusen shook his head. "No, even yesterday evening he paid me up for the very last days."

"Yesterday was Thursday; did he usually pay on that day?"

"No, he usually paid his bill on Saturdays."

"How long has he been here?"

"Since the beginning of the summer."

"Oh, indeed! During the whole time he's been away from the woman then. And he paid regularly, you said?"

"Yes, every Saturday regularly."

"But then, didn't you notice the change in the day? Didn't you wonder why he paid yesterday?"

Lahusen was embarrassed. "Well, I'll tell you," he said finally; "you see he was a suitor for my daughter's hand. She refused him yesterday and he told us that he would leave to-day."

"Oh, indeed!" A gleam in the Commissioner's eyes showed that he was surprised at this. "Hm!" he continued, "this refusal could hardly have caused him to run away by night and leave all his things here. It was probably the fear of discovery from his other doings that caused him to hurry up with his wooing and then to flee when this last hope went back on him. If I only knew how the knowledge that the woman had betrayed him reached him. Did he have any callers?"

"Never, that I knew of."

"Not even yesterday?"

"No—that is, in the night perhaps. That I do not know, of course."

"When did he go to his room?"

"A little after ten, I think."

"And you heard nothing more of him?"

"No."

The Commissioner examined the trunks and the clothes that were scattered about, but could find nothing except a few loose leaves of newspapers and the photograph of a large house that looked like a castle. "This looks familiar," he remarked. "Isn't this Prince Heinrich's castle, Hemmelmark?"

Lahusen did not know the castle in question, and stammered out that the swindler had showed him this building as his family home. "He took it easy," replied the Com-

missioner ironically. "This is a side view of Hemmelmark."

He asked for any further information about statements the swindler had made, and took down notes. "Did he receive any money through the mails or in any other way?"

"No."

"Then I don't understand what he lived on and where he got the five hundred marks that he gave the woman yesterday. He didn't have any money at all last spring." He looked sharply at the innkeeper. "You have a very large business, I understand. Did he manage to get in on the inside of that somehow?"

Christian Lahusen changed color. "Robbed me, you mean?"

"Exactly."

Lahusen beat his forehead. "Impossible! I—" he murmured several things to himself that were not quite polite. He told his visitor of how the Baron had handled the cash evenings in the store.

"That's the explanation," said the Commissioner coolly, with a short laugh. "Were you quite blind? Paid you regularly out of your own pocket—eh! He took it piece by piece, I suppose—are you sure that he didn't take larger sums?"

Lahusen started.

"I suppose you do not leave the money in the shop till. Where do you keep the larger sums?"

"In the private office behind the inn room."

"Has he ever been there?"

"Sometimes; he helped me with my accounts occasionally."

The Commissioner loosened the rope from the window and closed the blinds. "I will close this room and keep the key. You must leave everything just as I have found it. And now lead me to your office."

Lahusen hastened down the stairs. A sudden idea that the swindler might have utilized the last night to carry out some big trick caused him to hurry very considerably.

He threw open the door and stared into the narrow room. Apparently everything was in perfect order and the safe untouched. He let himself fall on a chair. "That *was* a fright!"

Groth looked about him carefully. On a chair beside the safe he saw a little box made of wire netting such as is used as a tray for small safes. He raised it. "Did you forget to shut this in?" he asked.

Lahusen sprang up. "Why—why, how did that get there?" He took out his keys, sought hastily for the key of the safe with fingers that trembled, and finally opened it. After one look, he sprang back with a cry of horror.

The inside compartments were half open. The bags of gold and silver, the portfolio with the banknotes and the draft of the Kruse firm, even the rolls of small change, were all gone. Lahusen groaned and cursed and carried on like a madman.

The Commissioner waited impatiently until he was somewhat calmer. "Do you want to waken the whole house and the neighborhood, and give the swindler warning?" he asked energetically. "Calm yourself and answer my questions first. This safe has been opened with the key that belongs to it or another one just like it. You must have guarded your keys very carelessly. You probably left it in the lock and gave him a chance to make an impression. How much money was there in the safe?"

"Nineteen thousand marks," groaned the robbed man, sinking down in a chair.

The Commissioner seemed surprised. "As much as that? In gold or paper?"

"Three thousand in gold," groaned Lahusen. "About eleven thousand in banknotes—and, my God! there was the draft for four thousand eight hundred—the rascal forgot nothing."

"A draft?" inquired the official, taking down the figures. "When due?"

"On sight—on sight! that's the worst of all. He'll cash it at once."

"A sight draft? Have you a telegraph station here?"

"Yes, at the railway station. I will wire at once," said Lahusen hastily.

"You can leave that to me," answered Groth coolly. "To whom was the draft made out?"

"Hamann & Son in Kiel—good Lord! if we could only save that!"

"Calm yourself, you will probably get back most of the rest of it also. The draft is the noose in which the criminal will hang himself." Groth spoke with conviction. "I will tell you a few hurried facts about this Baron, so that you may see what sort of a man he was. And then you must do exactly as I tell you if you want us to help you officially. I shan't bother to make a long report now. That will do later." He closed his notebook and leaned back against the table.

"Gliczek is an international swindler." Groth spoke somewhat as if he were giving a lesson, but rather more quickly. "His last operations were carried out in Vienna, and he is being sought for by the Russian, English, and Prussian authorities. He is one of the cleverest of his kind. The police have never before had such a man to deal with. He appears at places where we could by no possibility expect him to be, and he disappears as completely as a meteor drops from the sky. He is considered a marvel in the circles of criminals, and also among the police officials. What he has done here has proved that this opinion is justified. Let us hope that his greed, and his anxiety to get as much as possible, may lead him to his fate."

Groth looked at his watch hastily. "It is almost half-past six already. Hamann & Son will open their offices at nine o'clock, and the swindler will probably be among the first to present his draft. I will telegraph the police to notify the bank and watch for the thief there. And still further: I do not think that he has sought safety in further flight as yet, for he may not have known of his betrayal through the woman. He will take for granted that several hours will pass before his disappearance and his crime here

are discovered, and until then he will feel quite safe in Kiel. You must not warn him by any noise here. Until I notify you, you must say nothing to anyone in this place. Do not let a word of your loss escape you. Wait as patiently as you can until to-morrow evening, unless you should hear from me before then. Should we not find him at the bank, we want to have time to search the hotels and all the criminal haunts for him, before he knows that he has been discovered. To-morrow evening at the very latest you will receive a telegram from me. And now, will you please give me a sheet of paper? How will this do?" He read the telegram he had written: "Important, Police Headquarters, Kiel. Gliczek robbed safe of Lahusen in Brügghofen. Fled probably to Kiel. Watch for him at bank Hamann & Son, will probably present draft on sight. Return at once myself. GROTH."

"I will be there myself a few minutes after nine," he said to Lahusen, and took a cool official farewell.

. . . . .

Lahusen found his daughter waiting for him with his morning coffee in their own little room behind the inn room. The old man struggled hard to control his emotion, as he did not wish his daughter to have any suspicions of what had happened during the night. "Is everybody up?" he asked Dorothea, and then discovered that his household had taken the opportunity for a little extra morning nap. He hurried from door to door, calling them, and then returned to the coffee table.

"The—Baron—has gone away," he said slowly, avoiding looking at her.

She noticed his excitement and thought she understood it. "It is better so, father," she said quietly and softly.

He did not answer, took a few swallows of coffee and left the room. He closed and locked his plundered safe, and went out to the shores of the lake.

The fresh autumn air cooled his heated brow and seemed to relieve his pain. His blue eyes, under their heavy brows, glanced around, but without seeing what was before them.

The money lost, if it could not be recovered, was bad enough, and would cost him the profit of an entire year. More, perhaps, for it was impossible to oversee what the thief might have taken during his evening "assistance" in the shop. But, more than all that, he felt keenly the foolish part which the swindler had forced him to play in his own house—a part that would now make him the laughing-stock of the entire village. And then the thought of his daughter, that was the worst of all. Had the rascal dared to pretend affection for her simply for the sake of the chance to rob the house? Or should the sweet girl really have made an impression on the criminal, and had he really the intention of marrying her, of carrying disgrace into a respectable family? Lahusen rejoiced that his child had not been carried away by a title and the appearance of wealth, and that her sensible straightforward nature had felt sufficient dislike of the man to refuse him in spite of his amiability.

* * * * *

The natural impatience with which Lahusen awaited the evening of the following day grew from hour to hour as the appointed time came and went without the news for which he was so anxiously waiting.

As the evening neared its end he sought to console himself by the thought that the official might not have wished to content himself with the telegram, and that the following morning would surely bring him a letter. He did not sleep at all that night, arose early the following morning and went to the post office before the usual delivery hour. There were but a few letters for him, none of them from Groth.

Lahusen staggered to the waiting room of the railway station, which was still quite empty, and tried to collect his thoughts. What should he do? Should he wait longer, or should he telegraph himself? Yes, he would do that. The gentlemen at the police station would not be surprised at his natural impatience.

He found a telegraph blank in the anteroom of the office,

went back into the waiting room and wrote the following: "Police Headquarters, Kiel. Please ask Commissioner Groth for news whether Gliczek has been arrested and stolen money saved." He signed his full name, paid for his telegram without heeding the astonished expression of the operator, and returned to his home.

The answer came just as he had seated himself for his breakfast. He opened the envelope hastily and read: "Christian Lahusen, Brügghofen. Commissioner Groth unknown here. No information regarding Gliczek robbery received. Police Headquarters, Kiel."

Lahusen staggered, handed the telegram to his daughter and explained it stammeringly. "Twice betrayed—by the thief and by his accomplice!" he groaned, as the full consciousness of the truth burst upon him.

Dorothea accompanied him to the telegraph station. "Was—was there a telegram sent to the police station in Kiel — yesterday morning early — sent by Commissioner Groth—about a robbery in my house?" he asked of the operator.

"Groth—a robbery in your house?" repeated the official, looking through the file of the last two or three days. "No, I can't find anything," he said finally.

Lahusen wired to Hamann & Son about the draft. The answer, which was received almost immediately, read: "Draft four thousand eight hundred presented yesterday morning by Baron von Waregg. Claimed to be your son-in-law and money paid to him. If any trouble, let us know. Hamann & Son."

"Of course, of course," groaned Lahusen. "The thief knew that he would be discovered, and he warded off pursuit and gained two or three days, by the help of his accomplice. A very clever trick! The two rascals are probably safe over the frontier with their booty by now!"

The news about the swindler Baron and the robbery ran like wildfire through the quiet village, and the peasants gathered in scores in the inn room. They talked, disputed, told of their own distrust and warnings, asserted that they

had known all about it all along, and shrugged their shoulders over the so easily deceived Lahusen. They were sorry for him, but they declared that his punishment had not been undeserved.

The real police, called in too late, took great interest in the affair. But all they could do was to declare that all the talk about the "marvel" and the "well-known international swindler" was an invention of the imaginative accomplice. There were no records of any such person on the police lists.

But Lahusen remembered his Baron for many a year, long after he had overcome the actual money loss. When he forgot himself and began to lay down the law to his friends at the inn, the shrewd peasants would receive his dictatorial advice with an amused smile, and would remark: "Not even the Pope is infallible, they say. Remember your Baron von Waregg, Christian."

Venice at the Period of "Andrea Delfin"

THE scene and time of Heyse's "Andrea Delfin" are alike tragic. Venice was rarely a peaceful community in its early glory. But the years from 1750 on until nearly the close of the century saw the very blackest period. The Queen of the Seas had become a community torn by petty internal strife and jealousies.

Unsuccessful war had robbed the proud Republic of many of her possessions. Aggression from without could not be combated by a people harassed by tyranny within. Individual initiative was killed by despotism, industry and commerce suffered in consequence, and life in Venice offered nothing but the opportunity for political intrigue or private and public debauchery.

The Great Council, that splendid machinery of government, instituted in the early days of the Republic to secure the power to the Sovereign People forever, had come to be only an instrument in the hands of the nobility, helpless itself to control its own creature, the Council of Ten. This smaller council, at first merely a committee of the Great Council, chosen to act on certain special cases of urgency, had become the true seat of power, and with its own appointed committee, the Three Inquisitors of State, ruled Venice absolutely.

The Three Inquisitors were the final judges, and the mystery which surrounded their actions, *their very persons* even, made their rule a complete despotic tyranny, responsible to no one, sparing no one. No citizen of Venice was safe from interference in his most private affairs; open murder and secret assassination were the order of the day. The strife of the nobility among themselves rent the city asunder. A party of the older families, prominent since the earliest days of Venetian history, had been ousted from power by a younger faction which had captured the Council of Ten. They still held seats in the Great Council, but were powerless to control the Ten. Their jealousy broke out in constant petty rebellions which sharpened the tyranny of the Ten, and an era of oppression that would have done credit to the most despotic form of monarchy brooded over the nation calling itself a Republic. The absorption of power and wealth in the hands of the few meant poverty and loss of energy for the many, and the death knell of Venetian independence had sounded.—EDITOR.

Paul Heyse

Andrea Delfin

"Vengeance is mine, said the Lord"

ABOUT the middle of the last century there stood, in a side street of Venice, a quiet little street bearing the cheerful name "Della Cortesia," a simple one-story house. The Madonna was enthroned above its low portal, in a niche framed by wooden columns and quaint stone carvings. A tiny lamp, set in a globe of ruby glass, shone out before the statue day and night. Just inside the lower vestibule a steep staircase led to the upper rooms. On its higher landing another little lamp, hanging on chains from the ceiling, gave a dim light in the dark hall. In spite of the eternal twilight that reigned there, the staircase was the favorite place, for rest or work, of the owner, Giovanna Danieli. Since the death of her husband, Madame Giovanna had occupied the little dwelling with her only child, her daughter Marietta, renting some of the rooms she did not need to quiet, well-recommended strangers. Giovanna would explain her love for the stairs by saying that her eyes had become so weakened through weeping for her lost husband that they could no longer endure the full daylight. Her neighbors asserted that she enjoyed the opportunity her position on the stairs gave her for stopping those who went in or out, and chatting with them.

However this might be, her favorite place of sojourn afforded her little chance for amusement on the day and hour when we first make her acquaintance. It was an evening in August of the year 1762. For six months she had had no lodgers, and she was unlikely to have any visitors at so late an hour. Madame Giovanna had sent

her daughter to bed, and had settled herself on the stairs with a basket of vegetables beside her. But her hands rested idly in her lap, her head fell back against the railing, and she was just dozing off when three slow, heavy blows on the house door awoke her. She listened in alarm, not knowing whether she had really heard the noise. The blows of the knocker were repeated. Madame Giovanna shook her head, then walked slowly down the stairs, and asked through the crack of the door who demanded entrance at so late an hour.

A voice answered that a stranger stood outside who was looking for a room. The house had been recommended to him and he desired to remain for some time. His polite manner of speaking awoke Giovanna's confidence sufficiently to allow her to open the door. She saw a man in the quiet black garb of the middle-class citizen, holding a leather bag under one arm. His face attracted her attention. He was neither young nor old, his beard was dark brown, his eyes bright and fiery, his brow without a furrow. But around his mouth were lines of weariness and his close-cropped hair was quite gray.

"I regret to have disturbed you so late, my good woman," he said. "Tell me at once whether you have a room looking out upon the canal. I come from Brescia, and my physician told me that I must live near the water, as I need the moist air for my weak lungs."

"Fortune be praised!" exclaimed the widow. "My last lodger left me because his room was too near the canal; he complained that the water smelled as if rats had been boiled in it. They do say here in Venice that our canal water is a radical cure for all ills. But they mean it in the sense of the many times when the authorities send out a gondola to the lagoons with three passengers, and it returns with only two. God preserve us all! Is your passport in good order? Otherwise I may not take you."

"I have already shown it three times—in Mestra, in the police gondola outside the harbor, and at the Traghetto. My name is Andrea Delfin, my business that of scribe to

the notaries. I am a quiet man, and have as little to do with the police as possible."

"That is good hearing," said the little woman, leading her guest upstairs. "These are hard times, Ser Andrea. Is it not pretty here?" She opened the door of a large room and motioned him to enter. "The window there looks out upon the canal, and the other window opens on a little alley. But you must close that window on account of the bats. And across the canal there, so near that you could almost touch it, is the palace of Countess Amadei, who is as blond as yellow gold, and goes through as many hands. I will bring you light and water in a moment. Do you wish anything to eat?"

The stranger threw a quick, sharp glance about the room, went from one window to the other, and then threw his bag upon a chair. "This will do very well," he said. "We will soon come to an agreement about the price, I fancy. Bring me something to eat and a glass of wine if you have it."

His voice was gentle, but there was something of command in his manner. The woman left the room, and as soon as he was alone he walked at once to the window and leaned out, looking down at the narrow canal. The black water lay quiet, and opposite him rose the heavy mass of the palace, turning its front to the other street and showing him only a few dark windows. A narrow door opened almost under his window and a black gondola lay chained to the step.

All this seemed to please the stranger very much, particularly the fact that his other window looked out upon a blank wall, with no *vis-a-vis* to spy upon him. Below was a narrow courtyard, which seemed abandoned entirely to cats, rats, and birds of the night. A light from the hall brightened the room as the door opened and the little widow entered, bearing a candle. Behind her was her pretty young daughter, Marietta, carrying a tray upon which were bread, cold meat, fresh figs, and a half-filled bottle of wine. As the girl set the tray down upon the table she whispered

to her mother: "What a queer face he has! He looks like a new house in winter, when snow has fallen upon the roof."

"Be quiet, foolish child," whispered the mother quickly. "White hairs are oftentimes false witnesses. The gentleman is ill. Go and fetch the water now. He is very tired and will want to go to sleep." During these whisperings the stranger had sat by the window, resting his head in his hands. When he looked up, he scarcely seemed to notice the presence of the pretty girl, in spite of her polite courtesy.

"Come and eat," said the widow. "The figs are fresh and the ham is tender. This is a good wine which the Doge's own cellar keeper sold to my husband. You have traveled much, sir—have you perchance met my husband anywhere, Orso Danieli?"

The stranger had poured out a glass of wine and taken up one of the figs. "Good woman," he replied, "I have never been far from Brescia, and know no one of the name you mention."

Marietta had left the room, and her young voice was heard trilling a cheerful song as she ran down the stairs. "Just hear that child!" exclaimed Madame Giovanna. "She would rather dance and sing all day than do anything else. And it's ill singing here in Venice, where they say it's a good thing the fishes are dumb, because of the terrible things they might tell. But her father was just like that. My Orso was the best workman in Murano—where they make the colored glass. They say you can't find it anywhere else in the world. He had a gay heart, and he said to me one day, 'Giovanna,' he said, 'the air here chokes me. Just yesterday they hung a man because he dared to talk against the Council of Ten. Therefore, Giovanna,' said he, 'I'm off for France. I know my work, and just as soon as I've earned enough, you and the child can follow me.' He laughed when he kissed me good-by, but I wept, sir. Then a year later, sir, what do you suppose happened? The Signoria sent to me that I should write

him he must come back at once. No workman from Murano must dare to carry his skill and his knowledge into another country, they said. He laughed at the letter, but one morning they dragged me out of my bed, and took me with the child to the lead roofs—then they told me to write him again and tell him they would keep me there till he came himself. After that he wrote that he was coming. But I watched and watched, weeks and months, and oh, sir! my heart grew heavy and my head was sick—for it's hell out there under the lead roofs. And in the third month they let us out and sent us home, and told me that my Orso had died of fever in Milan. Others told me that, too—but I know the Signoria. Dead? Does a man die when he knows his wife and child are waiting for him under the lead roofs?"

"And what do you think has happened to your husband?" asked the stranger.

She turned her eyes on him with a look which reminded him afresh of the weeks she had spent under the dreaded "lead roofs." "Many a man lives and does not come back," she said. "And many a man is dead and yet he comes back. But it's best that I talk no more about it. How can I know that you may not repeat to the Tribunal what I am saying? You look like an honest man, but we trust no one in Venice to-day."

There was a pause. The stranger had pushed back his plate and was listening attentively. "I cannot blame you if you will not tell me your secret," he said. "But how comes it, my good woman, that you do not rebel?—you and all the others in Venice who have suffered so much at the hands of this Tribunal? I have troubled myself little with political questions, but I have heard that only a year ago there was an uprising against the Secret Tribunal, an uprising led by a member of the nobility. Then, finally, when the disturbance was quelled and the might of the secret judges stronger than ever, why then did the people rejoice and heap scorn upon the nobility? Why was there no one brave enough to protest when the Inquisitors sent

their rash enemy into exile in Verona? I know little about it, as I have said—but I think it strange that the people of Venice should complain of their tyrants, and then rejoice at the defeat of those who would put an end to the tyranny?"

The widow shook her head. "Then you never saw him, the Advocate Signor Angelo Querini, he whom they exiled? I saw him, sir, and many other poor people have seen him, and we all know him for an honest gentleman and a great scholar. But we could see also that he was a nobleman, and that all that he did and said against the Tribunal, he did and said not for the poor people but for the great gentlemen. But it's all the same to the sheep, sir, whether they are slaughtered by the butcher or eaten by the wolf. And therefore, the people rejoiced when the big thief hung the little one."

The stranger seemed about to answer, but contented himself with a short laugh. Marietta reëntered, bearing a pitcher of water and a little pan of sharp-smelling incense, which she held to the walls and ceilings to kill the flies hanging there in myriads. The women chattered gayly, but their new guest did not seem interested. He bade them a curt farewell when they finally turned to leave him, and when alone he sat for a long time motionless at his table. The shadows deepened in his face, and his whole figure was so quiet one might have thought him dead, had it not been for the wild fire in his eyes.

The clock from a neighboring church, striking the eleventh hour, aroused him from his thoughts. The sharp-smelling smoke of the incense still hung about the low ceiling; Andrea opened the window to clear the air. He saw a light in one of the windows opposite, and through the opening of a white curtain he could see a girl seated at a table eating and drinking. Her face had a care-free and light-hearted expression, although she was no longer in her first youth. There was something studied in the disorder of her dress and hair, something that was self-conscious but not unpleasing. She must have noticed that the

room opposite was occupied, but she continued her supper calmly. Then she set the empty dishes aside and moved the table with the lamp against the wall, that the light might fall on a tall mirror in the background. Whereupon she began to try on, one after the other, a number of fancy costumes which lay thrown about on the chairs. Her back was turned to the man opposite, but he could see her picture clearly in the mirror. And he could also see that the girl was watching his reflection sharply. As he remained motionless and she did not see the expected signs of applause for her appearance in her changing garb, she grew impatient. She took up a large red turban on which a heron's feather was fastened by a shining clasp. The vivid coloring looked well with her olive skin, and she made a deep bow to herself in the mirror. Then she turned suddenly and came to the window, pushing back the curtain.

"Good evening, Monsú," she said cheerily. "You are my new neighbor, I perceive. I hope that you will not play the flute all night as your predecessor did, keeping me awake thereby."

"Fair neighbor," answered the stranger, "I am not likely to disturb you with any sort of music. I am a sick man who is thankful if he is not disturbed himself."

"You are ill?" answered the girl. "Are you rich?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Because it is very sad to be ill and poor at the same time. Who are you?"

"My name is Andrea Delfin. I have been a scribe of the court in Brescia, and have come here to take service with a notary."

The answer seemed to disappoint her. "And who are you, fair maiden?" Andrea continued, with an interest in his tone belied by the expression of his face. "It will be a comfort for me in my suffering, to know that you are so near me."

This seemed to be what the girl was looking for, and she smiled as if pleased. "To you I am the Princess Smeraldina," she said, "and I will allow you to admire me from

a distance. When I put on this turban it is a sign that I am willing to chat with you. For I find many hours hanging weary on my hands here. You must know," she continued in a changed tone, "that my mistress, the countess, will not permit me to have a lover, although she changes her own lovers more often than she changes her gowns. If it were not that occasionally some pleasing stranger takes your room——"

"Who is the present lover of your mistress?" interrupted Andrea. "Does she receive the high nobility of Venice? Are the foreign ambassadors among her visitors?"

"They come to her masked, usually," answered Smeraldina. "But I know that young Gritti is her favorite now; she loves him more than I have ever seen her love anyone since I have been with her. She loves him more than she does the Austrian ambassador, who pays court to her until the others laugh at him. Do you know my countess? She is very beautiful."

"I am a stranger here, child. I have never seen her."

The girl laughed a sly laugh. "She paints her face, although she is not yet thirty. But you can see her easily if you wish to. I will arrange it some time. But goodnight now. I must go to her."

She shut the window. "Poor—and ill—" she said to herself as she drew the curtain. "Well, it is better than nothing."

The man opposite had closed his window also. "I might find that useful," he said to himself, with an expression which showed that there was no thought of love in his mind.

He unpacked his bag, and laid the few articles of clothing and the book or two which it contained in a cupboard in the wall. One of the books fell from his hand, and the stone on which it struck gave forth a hollow tone. Andrea put out his light at once, bolted his door, and commenced to examine the floor by the pale glimmer that came in through the window. In a few moments he found that it was possible to raise the stone, and beneath it he discovered a hole of considerable size. He removed his outer coat and

unbuckled a heavy belt with well-filled pockets, which had been fastened round his body. He was about to put it in the hole when he suddenly halted. "No," he exclaimed, "this may be a trap laid by the police. It is much too inviting to be safe."

He replaced the stone and sought for another, safer, hiding place for his secrets. The window looking out on the blind alley was barred, but the openings were large enough to admit of the passage of an arm. He felt about on the outer wall and discovered a tiny hole just under the sill. It could not be seen from below, and the window ledge hid it from above. He dug at the hole noiselessly with his dagger, and had soon widened it sufficiently to lay his belt in it. He examined it all closely when his work was done, to see that there was nothing of it visible, and then closed the window again. An hour later he was fast asleep, his lips tight set, as if fearing to reveal his secrets even in a dream.

The following day the newcomer arose early. He paused on the stair, where his landlady sat at her accustomed place, just long enough to inquire the way to the offices of several notaries whose names had been given him by a friend in Brescia. The widow looked at her guest in curiosity. He seemed so blind to everything about him, even to the young beauty of her Marietta. But in spite of his gray hair and the illness of which he had spoken, his step was quick and firm. His chest was deep and the color of his face was clear and youthful. Many a woman looked after him as he passed through the streets, although he did not seem to notice them in return.

Although Andrea had been so careful in asking directions from Madame Giovanna, when once out of his own street he threaded the net of alleys and canals as if quite at home there. Several hours passed in a vain search for work. In spite of the recommendations he had brought from Brescia, and in spite of the modesty of his manner, there was a certain look of pride in his carriage which

seemed to say that he considered the work he sought beneath his dignity. Finally, he found a position with a very low salary in the office of a little notary in a side street. The haste with which he consented to take the position made the owner of the office think that his new clerk was probably one of the many impoverished noblemen now trying to earn a livelihood by their own labor.

Andrea seemed quite satisfied with the result of his morning's work and entered the nearest inn, a haunt of the poorer classes, to take his dinner. He sat in a corner near the door and ate the simple food without complaint, although he did not seem to care for the wine after he had tasted it. He was about to pay for his food when his neighbor, whom he had not noticed hitherto, spoke to him. This was a man of about thirty years old, with curly blond hair, wearing the usual Venetian costume of quiet black, a garb which did not at once betray his Jewish descent. He wore heavy golden rings in his ears and jeweled buckles on his shoes, while his linen was far from clean and his clothes were unbrushed.

"You do not seem to like the wine, sir," he said in a low tone, turning to Andrea. "You have probably come here by mistake. They are not accustomed to serving guests of rank in this house."

"I beg your pardon, sir," replied Andrea quietly. "What do you know of my rank?"

"I can see by the way you eat that you do not belong to the class of those who come here daily," said the Jew.

Andrea looked at him sharply, then a sudden thought seemed to change his mood and impel him to meet the other with more friendliness. "You are a good judge of men," he said. "I have known better days, although I am the son of a small merchant and have studied law without any great success. But my father became bankrupt, and a poor scribe and lawyer's apprentice has no right to expect anything better than he can find in such a place as this."

"A scholar has always a right to demand respect," said the other with a polite smile. "I should be very glad to be of service to you if I could. I have always desired the company of gentlemen of learning. Might I suggest that you drink a glass of better wine with me?"

"I cannot afford better wine," said the other indifferently.

"I would look upon it as an honor to be allowed to show you our Venetian hospitality——"

Andrea was about to put an end to the conversation when he noticed the landlord beckoning to him from the back of the room. He noticed also that the other guests seemed much interested in his conversation with the Jew. With the excuse that he must first pay his account, he left his chair and walked to the table where sat the landlord. The old man whispered to him, "Oh, sir, be careful! That is a dangerous man. The Inquisitors pay him for prying out the secrets of all strangers who come here. I have to endure his presence to avoid trouble, but I can at least warn *you*."

Andrea thanked him, returned to his place and said to his officious neighbor, "I will go with you, sir, if you desire." Then in a lower tone, "I can see that they take you for a spy here. Let us continue our conversation elsewhere."

The Jew's face paled. "By God!" he said, "they wrong me. My business leads me in and out of many houses; but what do I care for the secrets that may be hidden there? However, I cannot blame these people for their watchfulness. The bloodhounds of the Signoria are in every street."

"But in my opinion, Ser— But what is your name?"

"Samuele."

"In my opinion, Ser Samuele, you think too hardly of those who are working for the good of the State, in that they discover all conspiracies against the Republic and frustrate them before they become dangerous."

The Jew stood still and caught at the other's arm.

"Why did I not recognize you at once? Since when are you in the service?"

"I? Since day after to-morrow."

"Are you mocking me, sir?"

"Most assuredly not. It is my serious intention to take service in those ranks. I am very poor as I told you, and the employment I have been able to obtain is miserably paid. I wish to better my condition."

"Your confidence honors me," said the Jew thoughtfully. "But the gentlemen do not like to take strangers into their service, until they have gone through with a trial apprenticeship. If my purse can be of any service to you during this time—I ask but very low rates of interest from my friends."

"I am grateful to you, but your protection and your recommendation are of greater service to me. This is my house, and I must leave you now, for I have much work to do. When I am needed, remember me: Andrea Delfin, Calle della Cortesia."

Andrea could not mount the stairs to reach his room without passing his little landlady, who, of course, was most anxious to know what he had done. She was far more discontented than he seemed to be at the position he had found. And she was much worried that he would not return to the streets, bright with sunshine, and enjoy the concert in the neighboring square. Even little Marietta, when she had brought him the supper he asked for later in the day, was too much abashed by the gravity of his expression to chatter as was her wont. "Oh, mother," she exclaimed, as she returned to the staircase, "I don't want to go into his room again. He has eyes like the martyr in the picture in the chapel. I can't laugh when he looks at me like that."

But little Marietta would have been very much surprised if she could have seen their guest several hours later. Under cover of the night, he stood at his window in lively conversation with the maid opposite.

"Fair Smeraldina," he said, "I could scarce await the

hour when I should see you again. As I passed the goldsmith's shop, I thought of you and bought you this brooch. It is not fine enough for you, but at least it is more real than the clasp on your turban. Open the window and I will throw it over, in the hope of going the same way myself soon."

"You are very gallant," smiled the girl, catching the little package. "And what good taste you have! I am glad of anything to make me rejoice to-day. It has been a hard day for us, for the countess is in a very evil humor. Her lover, the son of Senator Gritti, has not been here for four and twenty hours. She sent to his house, but he is missing from there also and it is feared that he has been imprisoned. The countess will see no one. She lies on her sofa, weeping, and struck at me when I would comfort her."

"Does no one know of what the young man is accused?"

"I would be willing to take a vow of eternal chastity, sir, if that poor boy is found ever to have conspired against the State. He was only three and twenty, and he thought of nothing but the countess or perhaps his game of cards. But the gentlemen of the Inquisition can make a hangman's rope out of a cobweb."

"Speak more cautiously when you mention the authorities," said Andrea gently. "The wisdom of our fathers gave them the power, it is not for us to doubt it."

The girl looked at him to see whether he was in earnest, but it was not easy to read his features. "Be not so grave, I pray you," she said. "I find it very stupid. You have been here but for a short time, therefore you still have some respect for these hangmen, who may, perhaps, look quite reverend from a distance. But I've seen them here at the card table and I can assure you that they're just like the rest of us."

"That may be, my child," he answered. "But they have the power, and it is not wise for a poor citizen like myself to utter such speeches at an open window."

"You may say what you like here," said the maid. "There are few windows looking out on the canal and the rooms are empty at this hour. On your side there is nothing but a blank wall. But will you not come over for an hour and drink a glass of wine with me? I have a board here which will make a bridge between our two windows. Are you easily dizzy?"

"No, indeed, fair friend. Patience for a moment and then I am ready to come to you." Andrea put out the light, bolted the door of his room, listened a moment, and then went to the window. Smeraldina had her improvised bridge ready and stood beckoning to him. He sprang up onto the window sill, looked down at the black water below with a calm eye, and with a single step had crossed the space. She caught him in her arms as he sprang down on the other side and her lips touched his cheek. But he assumed a modest demeanor, as if awed by the respect due his friend in her own home. The girl drew in the plank, brought cards and wine from a cupboard, and the two sat down to lively chatter.

Smeraldina had just poured herself the second glass of wine and was gently scolding her guest for not drinking more, when a bell shrilled out from somewhere in the house. The girl threw down her cards angrily and rose from her chair. "See how annoying it is, I haven't an hour to myself! But be patient for a few moments, I will return as quickly as I can."

Left alone, Andrea went to the window and looked carefully at the space of wall between his own window and the canal. It was not more than twenty feet in height and the plaster had become loosened in so many places that the naked stones afforded sufficient foothold for a good climber. The little door of the palace was immediately under the window at which he stood, and between the boat lying chained there and the wall opposite there was only just room for a second gondola to pass.

"I could not have arranged it better myself," he murmured, as he looked down thoughtfully at the dark waters

flowing between the blank walls. In the distance a pale light appeared, moving nearer, and in a little while the noise of oars floated up to him. A gondola came slowly down the stream and halted at the door below. The listener at the window drew back, but he could see a man step from the boat, and he heard three heavy blows of the knocker beneath. From within the house a voice asked who it was that demanded entrance.

"Open! in the name of the Mighty Council of the Ten!" was the answer. The door was opened and closed again behind the nightly visitor.

A few moments later, Smeraldina hurried back into her room in great excitement. "Did you hear it?" she whispered. "Oh! they have come to take our countess away!—They will kill her!—and who will pay me the six months' wages she owes me?"

"Be calm, dear child," he answered. "You will find good friends who will not forsake you. But I will be very grateful to you if you could hide me somewhere where I might hear what the Mighty Council has to say to your mistress. I am a stranger here and it would interest me greatly."

The girl thought a moment. Then she said, "I could do it easily—the hiding place is a good one—but suppose it should be discovered?"

"I will take it all upon myself, my dear, and no one shall know who let me into the house. Here is money, in case I may not be able to show my gratitude to you later. But if all goes well, you shall see that I am willing to divide the little I have with such a kind friend."

She slipped the money into her pocket, opened the door and looked out into the blackness of the corridor.

"Take off your shoes," she whispered. "Then give me your hand and follow wherever I may lead you. Everyone in the house is asleep except the doorkeeper."

She extinguished her lamp and slipped through the corridor, drawing him after her. They passed through several dark rooms, then entered a large dancing hall, dimly

lighted by a pale glimmer falling through the three high windows. On one side a staircase led up to a balcony for the musicians. "Have a care," warned the girl. "The steps creak. I will leave you alone now. You will find a crack in the wall up there, through which you can look down into the countess's reception room. But do not move from your place until I come for you."

She left him alone and he mounted the few steps and felt along the wall until he came to the crack. The neighboring room was separated from the great hall by a wooden partition only, as in earlier days the two had been one. Andrea knelt down and put his eye to the crack in the wall, through which a ray of light fell. Uncomfortable as his position was, there were many who would have been glad to change with him. A large silver candelabrum stood on the table, beside the divan upon which the countess lay. She was clad in a loose gown, which showed that she had not expected visitors at this hour. Her rich red-blond hair was caught up carelessly, her eyes, although reddened with weeping, still shone brilliantly. The man who sat opposite her in an armchair, turning his back to Andrea, seemed to be watching her sharply. He sat motionless, listening quietly to the angry words of the beautiful woman.

"I am astonished," said the countess, in a bitter tone. "I am astonished that you dare to show yourself here, now that you have so shamefully broken all your solemn promises to me. Is it for this that I have done you so many services? What have you done with him, with my poor friend, the only one I cared for—and whom you promised to spare, no matter what happened? Was there no other that you could find if your prisons are empty? Give him back to me or I will break off all relations with you—I will leave Venice and follow my lover in his exile. You will soon see what you have lost by this betrayal."

"You forget, countess," said the man, "that we have means to prevent your flight, or to find you wherever you might go. Young Gritti deserved his punishment. In spite

of our warnings, he continued to be seen everywhere with the secretary of the Austrian Ambassador, a young man who knows much too much. It was a sign of our paternal kindness toward him that we exiled him before he became more guilty. But we know what we owe you, Leonora. And therefore I have been sent to you to tell you of this, and to show you how all can be made good again if you will only be sensible."

"I am tired of taking orders from you," she said hastily. "I see now that it is impossible to have faith in you; I see now that it is useless to expect any return from you for all I have done. I want no more of you. I need you no longer."

"I am only sorry," he interrupted, "that we still need *you*. You will understand, Leonora, that it will not be possible for us to allow you, who know so many secrets of the Republic, to travel in foreign parts. You might fall a victim to the disease of the times, the desire to write memoirs. Venice and you are still inseparable, and you should by this time understand that it will not take us long to reconcile you."

"I want no reconciliation," she cried passionately, with tears in her eyes. "What would it mean to me?—I want nothing—I know nothing—but the one thought that I have lost my poor Gritti!"

"You shall have him back, Leonora. But not at once, for his sudden return would interfere with our plans."

"And how long must I wait?" she asked.

"That depends upon you," he answered. "How much time do you need to bring a young man to your feet? One who has a reputation for virtue?"

A gleam of interest brightened the despair of her face. "Of whom are you speaking?" she asked.

"I mean the young German who was Gritti's friend, the secretary of the Viennese minister. You know him?"

"I saw him at the last regatta."

"We have reason to believe that he is in communication with our opponents, and that he is utilizing the discontent

left by Querini's banishment for the good of his own sovereign. But he is very clever and we can obtain no proofs. For this we turn to you, Leonora; we want you to give us the key to the secrets of this well-guarded mind. We could hope for nothing from you as long as Gritti was here. His exile leaves you free and gives you an excuse for a nearer acquaintance with his friend. The rest I leave to the power of your charms, which are never greater than where they meet resistance."

She lay silent for a few moments; her eyes brightening, her beautiful mouth curving to a smile. "Then you promise to call Gritti back at once, when I have handed the other over to you?"

"We promise."

"You will not have to wait long then." She stood up and paced the room. Andrea could see her when she passed within the area commanded by the crack at which he sat. Her large, dark eyes, glancing upward, rested on his hiding place. He started involuntarily as if discovered. The man in the armchair stood up also, but seemed to be blind to her beauty, for he continued to talk in a businesslike tone:

"And one thing more, Leonora, the sum which we still owe you for the supper you gave Candiano——"

She started violently and changed color. "By all the saints," she exclaimed, "do not mention that again—give the rest of the money to the Church that they may read masses for his soul—and for mine. Whenever I hear that name, it sounds in my ears like the trumpet of the judgment day."

"You are a child," said the other. "The responsibility for that supper falls on us, not on you. Young Candiano was guilty of treason, but his connections and his high rank compelled us to punish him in secret. He died quietly in his bed, and no one could have imagined that he drank death here in your house. Or have you heard any rumors?"

She trembled and looked down. "No," she said; "but

in the night I awake with a start and some voice seems to call to me, 'You should not have done that—not that!'"

"It is your nerves, Leonora; you must conquer them. There is no one left who has the right to inquire into his death. His elder brother and his sister perished, as you know, by the burning of their home. The money is waiting for you whenever you wish to send for it. Good night, countess. I will not keep you awake any longer. Rest well, that the sun of your beauty may shine cloudless over the just and the unjust. Good night, Leonora!"

He bowed to her lightly and walked toward the door. For a fleeting moment Andrea could see his cold features. It was a face without a soul and without passion, illumined only by the expression of a mighty will. He put on a mask and threw a black cloak over his shoulder, then left the room. A moment later Andrea heard the girl's voice calling him softly. Like a man who has received a heavy blow he staggered down from the balcony and followed the maiden without a word. Her room was light again, the wine and cards stood ready on the table. But the man's face was darkened by heavy shadows, so black that it frightened even Smeraldina's careless nature. "You look as if you had seen a ghost," she said. "Take a glass of wine and tell me what you have heard. It passed off better than we expected."

"Oh, yes," he said, with forced calm. "The Ten are favorably disposed toward your mistress, and you are likely to receive your wages very soon. But they spoke so softly that I heard little, and I am very tired from kneeling on the hard boards. I will be better able to appreciate your kindness another time. To-night I must sleep." He sprang upon the board which she had laid across the window, and when he reached his own room he looked down into the canal, at the end of which the light of the disappearing gondola shone dimly. He called a good night over to the opposite window, and then disappeared into the darkness of his room, while Smeraldina endeavored in vain to ex-

plain to herself the strange contrasts in the behavior of her new friend.

A week passed and yet she had made very little advance in the conquest of her new neighbor. One evening after having won the favor of the doorkeeper, she let him in at the front door, led him through the house to the little portal over the canal and entered the gondola with him. He handled the oars himself, rowing slowly through the dark labyrinth of water streets until they reached the Grand Canal. But in spite of the *tête-à-tête* with Smeraldina, he did not seem to be in a very loving mood, and listened carelessly to her chattering comments on her mistress and the society in which she moved. From them he learned that for the last few days the secretary of the Austrian Embassy had spent long hours with the countess. The lady was in a better humor, and showered presents on her handmaiden. Andrea listened so inattentively that the girl did not object when he turned the boat and took the shortest way home. He drove the narrow gondola up to the steps, threw the chain around the post, and asked for the key which locked it. The girl was already in the doorway when her companion called out to her that he had unfortunately dropped the little key into the water. This seemed to annoy her; but with her customary carelessness she comforted him with the assurance that there was a second key somewhere in the house. As she let him out of the front door of the palace an hour later, he touched her cheek in a hasty kiss as he said good-by.

The next morning, he explained to his landlady that there was so much work in his new master's office that he had been obliged to spend the night there. This was the only time that he had asked for the key of the house. Usually he came home at twilight, ate a light supper and retired early. His landlady sang his praises to all her neighbors as a model lodger.

On the morning of the second Sunday after Andrea's advent in the widow's house, the little woman entered his room in great excitement. She was dressed in her best

clothes, as if just returning from church, but her face was drawn in emotion. He sat at his table reading, his face paler than usual, but his eye calm and quiet. "You are sitting here so quietly, sir!" she exclaimed. "And all Venice in excitement? Holy Jesus! To think that this should happen—and I thought that nothing more could occur here that would surprise me!"

"Of what are you speaking, good woman?" he asked in an indifferent tone.

She threw herself into a chair, breathless. "Would you believe it! Last night, between eleven o'clock and midnight, the noble Lord Lorenzo Venier, the highest of our three grand Inquisitors, was murdered on the doorstep of his own house!"

"Was he an old man?" asked Andrea calmly.

"Misericordia! you talk as if he had died in his bed! You are no Venetian, and you cannot understand what it means when an Inquisitor is murdered. But the most terrible thing about it is that on the dagger which they found in the wound were the words: 'Death to all Inquisitors!' That is no private revenge; that is a political murder, so my neighbor says. And it means conspiracy and revolution——"

"Have they any clew to the murderer, Madame Giovanna?"

"Not the faintest," answered the widow. "It was a dark, windy night; there was not a gondola to be seen on the Grand Canal, where his palace is. He came home alone through a side street, was struck down, and lived just long enough to arouse the doorkeeper. There was nobody to be seen. But I know what I know. You are a good man and you will not tell anyone if I say to you that I know the hand that shed this blood."

He looked at her firmly. "Say what you wish, I will not betray you."

She came close to him. "Did I not tell you that many a man may be dead and may yet come home? *He* could not forget that they threw his wife and child into the prison

under the lead roofs. But for God's sake, not a word of this." She looked about in the room and shivered. Then she continued in a whisper, "I heard queer noises last night—as if something were creeping up the walls—and splashing gently in the water—and there was a rattling at your window—and the bats in the alley flew about as if frightened, until long after midnight. I know what it was. *He* came—after he had done it—he came to greet us —because we had never said good-by to him."

Andrea's head was bowed as he said that he had slept so soundly that he had heard nothing in the night. He said also that it was best for her to repeat nothing of what she had told him, since it was a dangerous thing to have any knowledge of such a crime, even if committed by a ghost. Then he left the house and went out into the tumult on the street.

It was plain to be seen that some great excitement moved the minds of the crowds pouring toward St. Mark's Square from every direction. There was no singing, no laughing, nothing but sighs or whispered words and a steady crowding toward the center of the city. Andrea mingled with the stream, his hat drawn deep over his eyes, his hands crossed carelessly on his back. Now he entered St. Mark's Square, where the greatest crowd was gathered in front of the stately, ancient palace of the Doges. A company of soldiers was posted at the entrance, and no one allowed to enter who did not belong to the greater council. Upstairs, in the wide hall decorated by trophies of the great deeds of the Republic, the flower of Venetian nobility sat in secret conclave, and the crowd below were waiting to hear the decision. Andrea worked his way through until he had almost reached the palace, throwing a glance as he passed into the interior of the cathedral, which was filled to the last corner. In a few moments more he stood between the two high columns on the edge of the Piazetta Quay, watching the jam of black gondolas with their gleaming, steel-shod prows that flashed back the rays of the sun.

A large, open gondola, rowed by two servants in rich livery, flew past the quay. Under the canopy a lady lay carelessly inclining on the soft cushions, her head resting in her hand. Diamonds flashed from her red-gold hair; her eyes were resting on the face of a young man who sat opposite her, talking eagerly. She raised her head and looked out proudly at the crowd on the Piazetta. "The blond countess," Andrea heard the people behind him murmur. He turned with a shudder and found himself face to face with the Jew, Samuele.

"Where have you been all these days, sir?" exclaimed the latter. "I have been looking for you everywhere. If you will come with me I have much to tell you that may interest you." He called up a gondola and drew Andrea in with him.

"What have you to say to me?" began Andrea, "and where are you taking me?"

"Do not go to your notary to-morrow morning," said the Jew. "It may be possible that I shall fetch you for a more lucrative errand."

"What do you mean?"

"You know what happened last night? It is unheard of that now, twelve hours after such a murder here in Venice, there is no trace of the murderer. We will have lost our credit with the Signoria, with the people, and with all the strangers who expect our police here to work wonders. The Council of Ten are angry at such poor service. They will be looking for new helpers. And if you think still as you did ten days ago, you may soon find better work than that which you are doing for your notary. I know faces, and I can see that you have yours in your control. The man who can hide his own thoughts is the man to discover the thoughts of others."

"I am still of the same mind. But who is to decide whether I can be of use?"

"The Tribunal will question you; all I can do is to recommend you. They are now choosing the third man again. *I* would not take the position, no matter what they might

offer me. The inscription on that dagger was not made for amusement."

"But there is no doubt that the man who is chosen must accept the position? Or will he refuse?"

"Refuse! Do you not know that the Republic has a heavy punishment for any man who dare refuse office?"

They were now passing a broad stairway leading down to the water, about which a crowd of gondolas swayed and pushed. It was the Palazzo Venier, where the dead man lay. Andrea forced himself to appear calm, and inquired, "Have you business here, Samuele? or is it only curiosity to see the dead that brings you?"

"I am here on business," answered the Jew, "and it may prove useful to you to come with me. Do you know, I would be willing to wager that among all these who come here apparently to condole, there are not a few of our enemies. The murderer himself, perhaps, may be even now dismounting from one of these gondolas. He may be clever enough to know that he is safer here than anywhere else, for the police are searching everywhere—everywhere the slightest suspicion could fall." With these words, he sprang out of the gondola and held out his hand to Andrea. "Will it alarm you to see the dead?" he asked.

"No, indeed, Samuele," answered Andrea quickly. "Let us go upstairs and pay our respects to the great man; he was not likely to have received us so unceremoniously during his lifetime."

In the great hall of the palace the catafalque was set up under a high canopy. Tall cypresses reached to the ceiling, the candles on high silver candelabra flared in the breeze that came from the open balcony, and four servants in mourning livery held watch at the corners of the bier. The sharp profile of the dead man rose white from the black velvet of his shroud. Andrea recognized the features that he had seen, and cherished in his memory, from that short moment in Leonora's room. But no quivering of lips or eyes betrayed that the murderer stood beside his victim.

An hour later, Andrea returned to his home and heard from his landlady that the police had searched the room during his absence, but that they had found everything in good order. The little woman gave him much advice as to how to act in this dangerous time, when suspicion might fall upon one for the slightest carelessness. Early next morning, before he had arisen, Samuele entered his room. "If you are anxious to earn fourteen ducats a month," said the Jew, "come with me at once."

"Have they chosen the new Inquisitor?" asked Andrea.

"I believe so."

"And they have no clew to the conspiracy?"

"None at all. The nobility are much alarmed, and are shutting themselves up in their houses. The foreign ambassadors are sending, one after the other, their solemn assurances that they have had nothing to do with this deed. The Three will hold themselves more in secret than ever, and there will be a price set upon the head of the murderer which will make a poor man rich for the rest of his life."

When they reached the palace, Samuele knocked at a little door in the courtyard and was allowed to enter up a narrow stairway. After they had passed several armed sentries, they were ushered into an apartment of medium size, the windows of which were half covered by heavy curtains. Three men, in masks which almost hid their faces, were walking up and down engaged in a whispered conversation. A fourth man, unmasked, sat at a table, writing by the light of a single candle.

"Is this the stranger of whom you spoke?" asked the scribe.

"Yes, your honor."

"You may go now, Samuele." The Jew bowed and left the room.

There was a pause, during which the secretary of the Tribunal looked through several papers before him. Then he turned a sharp glance on the stranger and said: "Your name is Andrea Delfin. Are you related to the Venetian nobili of this name?"

"Not that I know of. My family have lived for many generations in Brescia."

"You live in the Calle della Cortesia, in the house of Giovanna Danieli. You desire to enter the service of the mighty Council?"

"I wish to offer my services to the Republic."

"Your papers from Brescia appear to be in good order. The notary with whom you worked there for five years gives you the name of a sensible and reliable man. But we know nothing of the six or seven years before you came to him. Were you in Brescia during that time?"

"No, your honor," answered Andrea quietly. "When I had exhausted my small patrimony, I was obliged to take a position as servant, and I traveled with my master."

"And your references?"

"They were stolen from me, with the bag which contained my entire property. I was tired of traveling and returned to Brescia. My various masters had utilized me for secretary work at times. Therefore I sought service with a notary, and your honor can see that my work was satisfactory."

He said all this in a quiet, modest manner, his head bent slightly forward. Suddenly one of the three masked men approached the table and Andrea felt piercing eyes resting upon him. "What is your name?" asked the Inquisitor, in a voice weakened by age.

"Andrea Delfin. Here are my papers."

"Remember that it is dangerous to deceive the High Tribunal. What if I should tell you that your name is —Candiano?"

A short pause followed these words—a silence so complete that the gentle ticking of the death worm in the walls could be heard. Four pairs of eyes were turned toward the stranger.

"Candiano?" he answered slowly in a firm voice. "Why should my name be Candiano? I wish that it might be, for as far as I know, the Candiano family are rich and

noble, and no one who bears this name need earn his bread with his pen."

"You have the face of a Candiano; your manner and bearing show a higher rank than these papers would give you."

"I cannot help the look on my face, noble gentlemen," answered Andrea calmly. "And as for my manners, I have endeavored to learn what I could from my various masters."

The other two Inquisitors had come nearer also, and one of them, whose red beard shone out under his mask, said in a low tone: "There is a resemblance, I confess, it is this, probably, that deceives you. But you know yourself that that branch of the family which was settled in Murano has died out entirely. The father was buried in Rome, the sons did not long survive him."

"That may be," answered the first. "But look at him, and say yourself if you would not think that it was old Luigi Candiano risen from his grave and grown younger. I knew him well enough." He took the papers from the table and looked through them carefully. "You may be right," he said finally. "The age does not agree. This man is too old for one of Luigi's sons. If he is born out of wedlock—then we need have no fear of him!" He threw the papers down again and retired with the others to the window. The steady glance of Andrea's eyes did not reveal the terrible weight that was lifted from his soul at this moment.

The secretary began again to question him, and discovered that he knew the French language and something of German. After a few moments' consultation with the three at the window, the secretary returned to the table and said: "You will be given the pass of an Austrian citizen born in Trieste. With this you are to go to the house of the Austrian ambassador, and ask for his protection, saying that the Republic threatens to exile you. This visit is to give you the opportunity of making the acquaintance of the secretary of the embassy. Your task

is to find out if any personal and secret relations exist between the Viennese court and the nobility of Venice. You are to make no change in your manner of life. We will pay you twelve ducats for the first months; if you prove yourself worthy, the sum will be doubled."

Andrea bowed as a sign that the arrangement was satisfactory. "Here is your German pass," said the secretary. "Your house stands next the palace of the Countess Amidei. It should be easy for you to make the acquaintance of her serving maid. We will pay you whatever expenses you may incur in doing this. Report to us whatever you may hear about the relations of the countess with Venetian noblemen. And one thing more," here the secretary opened a little box which stood upon the table. "Step nearer and look at the dagger in this box. There are large armor factories in Brescia. Do you remember ever having seen any work of this character?"

Controlling himself by a tremendous effort, Andrea looked into the little box, looked at the weapon which he knew only too well. It was a double-edged knife with a steel handle in the form of a cross. On the blade, still stained with blood, were carved the words: "Death to all Inquisitors!"

After a long pause he pushed back the box with a hand which did not tremble. "I do not remember to have seen this dagger, or one like it, in any shop in Brescia," he said.

The secretary closed the box and dismissed him with a gesture. Andrea walked out slowly past the sentries, through the echoing corridor, and not until he reached the stairs did he permit himself to sink down upon a seat. His knees trembled, cold drops shone on his forehead, his tongue clove to his palate.

Out on the open street again he threw back his head defiantly, and regained his usual calm, quiet demeanor. With an apparently careless eye he read a placard announcing the high reward set upon the capture of the murderer. Then he called a gondola and rowed to the palace of the Austrian ambassador. Just as he was about to leave his

boat, a tall young man standing before the door turned suddenly and exclaimed in delight. "Ser Delfin! how delightful that we should meet here! Do you not know me? Have you forgotten our evenings on the Garda Lake?"

"Is it you, Baron Rosenberg?" answered Andrea, taking the other's hand heartily. "Are you in Venice for some time?"

"Heaven alone knows for how long," said the other. "For you must know, dear friend, that I am now secretary to his excellency, the Austrian ambassador. I fear you may not wish to be recognized as an old acquaintance of mine?"

"I am not afraid," replied Andrea. "If I am not disturbing you, I would like a few moments' talk with you."

"Oh, then, you were coming to see me without knowing me? I am all the more glad to do whatever I can for you."

Andrea blushed and felt for the first time the humiliation of his disguise. The Austrian pass in his pocket seemed to weigh like lead; but the control that hard years had won for him did not desert him.

"I wish merely to ask for some information about a German firm," he said. "For I am here in Venice in the very modest position of scribe to a notary. But as I was nothing more in Brescia, and you still did not think me unworthy of your acquaintance and that of your mother, I am very glad to meet you again. You must first of all tell me of that noble lady, whose great kindness to me still lives fresh in my memory."

The young man led his guest up to a comfortable apartment, where Andrea's eyes fell first upon a large portrait hanging over the desk. He recognized the brilliant eyes and the shining hair of Countess Leonora.

His host pulled two armchairs to a window through which one looked out over a broad canal to the rear wall of an old church. "Sit down and make yourself quite at home," he said. "Can I offer you some wine or a sherbet? But you are not listening to me—you are looking at that picture. Do you know who it is—but who in Venice would not know it? Do not talk to me of this woman. I know

all they say of her and I believe it all, and yet I assure you in all seriousness, that even you yourself, if you could stand before her, would forget everything except joy that you are there."

"Is this picture your property?" asked Andrea after a pause.

"No. It belonged to a more fortunate man than I—a handsome young Venetian who had the good luck to be her favorite. The poor fellow was careless enough to become my friend, and this crime has been punished by banishment. And it is now *my* punishment to have this picture before me, and to see the eyes of the original clouded with tears for his sake."

He stood before the picture as he spoke, looking at it with sad eyes. Andrea looked at him, in his turn, with the deepest sympathy. The young man could not be called particularly handsome, but a mingling of youthful slenderness and manly gravity made him very attractive. Nobility and energy were shown in the grace of his tall figure. His guest exclaimed involuntarily: "And you—you too can love this woman, so unworthy of you?"

"Love?" answered the young German in a gloomy tone. "Who says that I love her?—that I love her as I have loved at home? Say rather that it is an obsession, that I wear her fetters with groaning and with gnashing of teeth; that I am ashamed of my weakness, and yet revel in it. I have never known before what joy it is to feel one's shoulders borne down by a self-chosen yoke, and to feel all one's pride crushed to the dust for a smile from such eyes. But I am tiring you. Let us talk of something else. How has the world gone with you since you left Brescia?"

"Talk to me rather of your mother," said Andrea. "What a woman she is! The very stranger even feels the desire to love and respect her as a mother."

"Ah! Yes! yes!" exclaimed the other. "Let us talk of her—it may free me from this evil spell that has fallen upon me. Would you believe that I could be so ungrateful as ever to forget what a mother she has been to me? Would

you believe that I have already received three letters from her, in which she implores me to leave Venice and return to her in Vienna? She feels that there is some evil waiting for me here—alas! she does not know how great the evil is that has already crossed my path—she does not know that nothing holds me here but a woman whose name I would not dare mention in her pure presence. But, no—it is not quite as bad as that. It would not be possible for me to leave my post just now. My chief, the count, believes that I am indispensable to him, and there is much to do at this moment. It may not be unknown to you that we have fallen into disfavor here. They have even gone so far as to blame us for Venier's murder, a deed which we all abhor! For, don't you think yourself," he continued eagerly—"don't you think yourself that it will be quite impossible to gain the evident object, the fall of the Tribunal, through a path of crime like this? The question of morals quite apart, is it at all possible that any conspiracy could remain sufficiently long undiscovered to make it at all of use?"

"Quite impossible," answered Andrea carelessly. "What three Venetians know, the Council of Ten knows. It is only strange that they were served so badly this time."

"And suppose that it *should* be possible to the conspirators to heap murder upon murder, until no one can be found who will take upon himself the dangerous honor of an inquisitor's office—what would be won by that? The pillars of a healthy State are undermined in Venice, and only the stern hand of tyranny can hold the rotten structure together for a short time longer. But you see how careless I am for a diplomat who would win his spurs in Venice! Here I know you only slightly, and I am already talking so freely to you! But I think I know something of character, and I do not believe that a mind like yours could ever bend to the service of the Signoria."

Andrea held out his hand to his friend. But in the same moment he turned and saw, several steps behind them, his colleague Samuele standing in the middle of the room. The

Jew had opened the door softly and walked quietly across the heavy carpet. He bowed deeply to Rosenberg, pretending not to notice Andrea. "Your honor will pardon me for entering unannounced, there was no lackey in the anteroom. I bring the jewels you asked for."

He pulled several boxes from his pocket and laid them carefully on the table with all the manner of the Jewish merchant, a manner he was careful to suppress in his other affairs. While the young nobleman examined the jewels, Samuele threw a meaning look to Andrea, who had turned from him and was looking out of the window. He knew what the Jew's appearance in this hour meant. The spy was set to watch the spy, the old hand was to encourage the novice in his trial venture.

When Rosenberg had chosen a chain with a ruby clasp, paid for it without bargaining, and dismissed the Jew with a gesture, he turned to Andrea again. "Do you know anything about that Jew?" asked the latter.

"Oh, yes, I know him. He is a spy set to watch us in our house by the Council of Ten. I am sorry for your sake that he should have come in just then. He saw me take your hand; I wager that in less than an hour your name will be in the black book."

Andrea smiled bitterly. "I am not afraid, my friend. I am a peaceful man and my conscience is clear."

Four days later, on a Saturday evening, Andrea asked his landlady for the key of the house. She praised his decision to make an exception from his usual rule and spend one evening out of doors. It would be worth while on this particular evening; the funeral ceremonies for the noble Lord Venier, in the Cathedral San Rocco, would be well worth seeing. Andrea replied that he would rather avoid the crowd, and that he preferred to take a gondola and row out toward the Lido.

He left the house and walked down the street in the opposite direction from that leading to San Rocco. It was already eight o'clock; a fine rain thickened the air, but did not prevent crowds of people from streaming in all

directions toward the great church across the canal where the funeral mass for the murdered Inquisitor was to be sung. Andrea paused in a dark side street, took a mask from his pocket and fastened it over his face. Then he walked quickly to the nearest canal, and sprang into a gondola, giving the order: "To San Rocco."

The stately old church was bright as day with the light of innumerable candles, and alive with the swaying movement of a tremendous crowd. A great silver cross stood at the head of the catafalque, and the coverings of black velvet bore the crest of the Venier family. The chairs arranged in a semicircle up through the entire depth of the choir were draped in black, and were filled by representatives of the entire Venetian nobility. Not one of them dared to be missing on this occasion, for not one of them wished to allow a doubt of the sincerity of his grief. On another row of seats sat the foreign ambassadors. Their number also was complete when the solemn sound of the trumpets from the height of the dome announced the beginning of the ceremonies.

Two men walked hastily, absorbed in eager conversation, through a side street which led under gloomy arcades to the square of San Rocco. They did not notice that a third man was following them, keeping closely to the dark shadows of the houses, his face and figure hidden by mask and cloak. The two who walked on ahead did not wear the mask. One of them was a gray-bearded gentleman of noble dignity of bearing; his companion, much younger, listened with respectful attention to what the elder man was saying.

And now they came past the spot where a bright lamp in a house window threw a sharp light out over the street. Their follower in his mask had come close to them and looked at them eagerly as the light fell on their faces. He could plainly see that the younger man was the Secretary of the Inquisition; and the face and voice of the older man had been seen and heard in the Chamber of the Secret Tribunal. It was the voice which had told Andrea Delfin that he was a Candiano.

"Go back at once," the older man was saying, "and finish this affair immediately. You may order the first hearing of the prisoners, for it is not likely that I will be able to return until midnight. If there is any immediate report to make, you may find me at the house of my brother-in-law when the ceremony is over."

They parted, and the elder man walked more quickly through the silent arcades toward the square. The music in the church was silent now, and thousands of eyes turned toward the pulpit where a white-haired feeble priest, the papal nuncio, was slowly mounting the steps supported by two younger clergymen. There was not a sound to be heard as the old man's weak voice arose in a solemn prayer.

The last echo of the amen had scarce rolled down from the domed roof when a murmur arose among the crowd at the portal, running rapidly through the length of the church until the entire assemblage was swaying uneasily as the surface of an ocean. All eyes were turned toward the great doors, from which the nameless terror had come. Torches waved across the dark square, and after a moment's breathless pause in the first birth of the excitement a hundred-voiced cry was heard: "Murder! Murder!"

A panic which threatened to tear apart the walls of the old church followed this sound. Nobles and plebeians, priests and choir boys, the guardians of the catafalque, thousands of men and women—all rushed blindly to the exit. The old man in the pulpit stood alone in quiet dignity, looking down upon the struggling crowd at his feet, and left his place only when the empty church showed him that his duty was over.

Outside on the open square the terrified crowd pushed and struggled toward one spot where gathered torches flared in wind and rain. A troop of the guards, called up in haste, stood about a motionless body lying at the entrance to a dark side street. By the light of the torches the blood was seen streaming from a wound in the side, and in the wound itself was a dagger with a steel cross for

a handle, a dagger which bore the words: "Death to all Inquisitors."

. . . . .

The effect on Venice of this terrible discovery resembled the effect of the second and fatal shock of an earthquake. The first shock had caused surprise and terror—a terror which the very suddenness rendered fleeting, as the realization of what had happened could not penetrate the consciousness so quickly. But this second shock brought full comprehension. It was not possible to conceal the fact that the wounded man was one of the Three. This time the dagger had been turned aside by a heavy undergarment, and the victim was not dead. But the injury was very serious, possibly fatal, and caused a pause in the business of the Secret Tribunal, as the consent of all three members was necessary for every decree. Worse even than this laming of the power of government was the apparent penetrating of the secrecy which surrounded all its acts and which surrounded the very personality of its possessors. The choice and election of the third Inquisitor had been carried out in the Council of Ten with the utmost secrecy protected by the most solemn oaths, and yet a few days later a blow had struck down the newly elected Inquisitor. The thought lay near that treason must dwell in the very innermost circles of the government itself. The Secretary of the Inquisition, the last person to see the wounded man before the attack, was arrested, submitted to the most severe examinations, and threatened with a terrible death. But all in vain.

Venice was practically in a state of siege after this second attack. Half the city was in the service of the government to watch the other half. The streets were patrolled day and night; the wearing of masks, or the carrying of weapons of any sort, was forbidden under pain of severe punishment; and every gondola that landed passengers at the quays was inspected. No one was allowed to leave Venice, and a ship at the entrance to the harbor held up even the messengers of the government. Far beyond the limits of

the city the news of these conditions spread like a panic. Anyone planning a journey to Venice postponed it indefinitely. Merchants having business connection with Venetian houses withdrew their orders until the Reign of Terror should have passed over. Inside the town, the nobles left their houses only under pressure of dire necessity, and refused to receive visitors, as it was impossible to know that one's nearest friends might not be concerned in the conspiracy. Even the common people, usually unconcerned in the quarrelings of the higher powers, felt the increasing gloom of the nameless terror that had seized upon the entire town.

Among the few people who did not allow the panic to influence their thoughts or actions was Andrea Delfin. The morning following the deed he had been ordered to the palace and put through an examination as to what he might have seen and heard during the hour of the attack. He had said that he had been out on the Lido, endeavoring to discover the opinions of the fishermen. His friend Samuele had at once reported his noticeable friendliness with Baron Rosenberg. Andrea explained this by his former acquaintance with the young secretary, which could only be of use to the Tribunal.

He spent some part of every day with his German friend, as the two men had begun to find more and more real pleasure in each other's society. The baron told Andrea laughingly that he had been warned against him as a secret spy of the Tribunal. But Andrea's calm answer gave the other an assurance which was scarcely needed, as his confidence in his Italian friend was complete.

One day, as Andrea was leaning over the edge of a railing looking down at the quiet waters of the canal, some one called his name from a gondola, and he saw Baron Rosenberg waving eagerly to him from the cabin. "Have you an hour free?" cried the young man. "Then come with me. I am in a hurry, but want to speak to you." When Andrea had entered the boat the baron continued, pressing his friend's hand warmly, "I am very glad indeed to have

met you. I would have been very sorry to have had to depart without bidding you good-by, but I feared for your sake to visit you or even to send for you."

"You are going away?" asked Andrea, startled.

"I must. My dear mother is worrying about me. I have a piteous letter from her begging me to return. Her physician tells me that I must be with her or she will fall seriously ill. Here is the letter."

When Andrea had read it he returned it to the other, saying: "It is indeed touching, and yet I could almost wish that you would not go just now. Not alone because I shall be so utterly solitary when you are gone—but it is not safe now for anyone to leave Venice. For you to do so would be to incur suspicion of flight. Have you had any difficulty in obtaining permission to leave?"

"Not the slightest. But how could they prevent me? I am a member of the embassy."

"Then you have a double reason for caution. Many a door stands invitingly open here in Venice which leads to an abyss beyond. If you will follow my advice, you will not show yourself so openly in the streets the last hours before your departure. You cannot tell what may be done to prevent your going."

"But what can I do?" asked the young man. "You know it is forbidden to wear masks."

"Then stay at home, and let the representatives of the Republic wait in vain for your farewell visit. When do you leave?"

"To-morrow morning at five. I expect to be away about a month. Now that I have fully decided to go, I am almost glad of this heroic treatment, although it hurts me cruelly. When I am far away from the fatal charm of the enchantress, I may be able to throw off the spell of her power forever. And yet, would you believe me, dear friend, I tremble at thought of parting."

"The best cure for that would be to part from her at once."

"You mean not to see her again? You ask too much."

Andrea caught the other's hand. "My dear friend," he said with more tenderness than he had ever shown before, "I have no right to ask any sacrifice of you. But the deep affection that has drawn me to you from the very first gives me the courage to make a request of you. I beg of you, by the memory of your noble mother, do not go to the countess's house. I have a premonition, strong enough to be almost a certainty, that some terrible evil will befall you if you see this woman during the last hours before your departure. Promise me, I beg of you, promise me!"

Rosenberg shook his head gravely. "Do not ask a promise of me; be content that it is my will to follow your advice. But the demon may be stronger than I am myself."

They sat silent for some time while the gondola moved gently through the quiet waters. Near the Rialto, Andrea caused the boat to halt, as he would be obliged to leave his friend here. He started and trembled slightly at the other's question whether he would still be in Venice a month later. He held his friend's hand for some time, and stood looking at the boat long after it had moved on.

Andrea Delfin had long since cut himself loose from all ties that could bind him to another personality; the terrible task that he had set for himself had seemed to kill all human instincts within him. But he himself was astonished at the pain the parting from this young man awoke in his heart. He found himself wishing that he might not see him again until his work was done. He decided to write to the mother and warn her not to allow her son to return to Venice. The thought seemed to cause him great relief, and he hurried home to carry out his intention at once. But alone in his gloomy room he could not control the unease and distress that kept him pacing up and down the narrow space. He knew that the softening of his heart did not come from any twinge of conscience or from any fear of the discovery of his terrible secret. That very morning he had been called before the Secretary of the Tribunal and had seen how complete was the panic of the government.

The wounded Inquisitor still lay between life and death. One blow more and the building with its undermined foundations must fall forever. Andrea felt no doubt as to his mission, no doubt as to the protection of Providence for his work. It was a something else, a vague premonition he could not understand, which made him uneasy now and would not allow him to regain his usual iron composure.

The tenor of his thoughts was interrupted as twilight fell by a sound at Smeraldina's window opposite. He had neglected the girl lately, and now hastened to make up for this with particular friendliness, as he found the connection too useful to lose. Smeraldina was soon reconciled, and told him that her countess was expecting a number of gentlemen to play cards that evening.

"Is the German baron coming, the one you told me of?" asked Andrea.

"He? Why, of course not. He is so jealous that he will never enter the house if he knows anyone else is here. Besides, he is going away—and we are not sorry."

Andrea breathed a sigh of relief. At ten o'clock, as arranged, he stood before the portal of the palace waiting for the girl to let him in. The air was thick, the night cloudy, and the few passers through the little square wrapped themselves in their cloaks. As Andrea stood and waited, he remembered the evening that another Candiano had crossed this threshold to meet his death. He shivered, and the hand he held out to the girl a moment later was icy cold. Once in her room he would not consent to sit down at the richly spread table she had prepared, but persuaded her to allow him to look through the crack in the wall once more, pretending great curiosity to see what a card party among rich people might be like. He spoke jokingly, and protested that he would return to her very soon.

When he had taken his uncomfortable position on the little platform and looked down at the neighboring room, he would scarcely have recognized it again. Tall mirrors reflected the light of many candles, and their golden frames

shot out flashes that awoke answering gleams from the painted walls. Jewels sparkled on the white throat of the fair Leonora, but her eyes were tired and rested with indifference on the cards and on the faces of the young men about her. The money passed rapidly from hand to hand at the card table. One young gallant, weary of the game, sat on a divan singing sentimental barcaroles to the accompaniment of the lute, while servants passed noiselessly over the thick carpet carrying trays of refreshments. The watcher on the platform was about to retire, seeing nothing to interest him, when one of the great doors was suddenly opened and a stately figure entered the card room, greeted by a sudden respectful silence. It was a man past middle age, carrying his white head still proudly erect on stalwart shoulders. He threw a quick glance over the young men and bowed to the countess, as he prayed her not to allow him to disturb the company.

"You are asking too much, Ser Malapiero," answered the countess. "These young men have too much respect for the many services you have rendered the Republic that they should continue their sinful pastime in your presence."

"You mistake, fair Leonora," said the newcomer. "I have long since retired from all political activity, and find myself still young enough at heart to wish to enjoy a merry hour over cards and wine in the presence of beauty. But I do not come to-night to lay claim to your hospitality. I stepped in for a moment to bring you news of your brother, news which I have received from Genoa to-night. It is good news, and will not spoil your mood, therefore I feel free to ask for a few moments of your time. May we step in here?" He pointed to the door of the great hall.

Andrea started up, but realized that it would be impossible for him to leave his place without being seen. With quick decision he laid himself flat on the floor of the platform in a position which enabled him to hide behind the low railing. He heard the opening of the door, the rustle of the countess's gown and the step of the old man who

followed her, asserting that he did not need a light for the few words he had to say. The door closed behind them, and they stood just below the platform.

"Why do you come here?" asked the countess hastily. "Do you bring me the news that Gritti will return?"

"You have not fulfilled the conditions, fair Leonora. You have not revealed to us any of the secrets from Vienna."

"Is it my fault? I did everything a woman could do, and this stubborn German is absolutely my captive. But not a word of business would pass his lips—and he is going away to-day, as you know. I am ill of annoyance over the whole matter."

"It would be more agreeable to us if it were he who were ill."

"What do you mean?"

"He is going away, and it is not possible for us to stop him. But we are quite certain that he has important messages to carry to Vienna, and he must be prevented from reaching there. It is you who can hold him."

"And how?"

"Send him a messenger to come to you at once. He will surely come. And when he does, it must be your care that he shall fall ill."

She interrupted hastily. "I have vowed never to do that sort of thing again."

"You will receive absolution. And we do not wish that he shall die; in fact, that would make it very disagreeable for us."

"Do what you will," she said, "but leave me out of it."

"Is this your last word, countess?"

"It is."

"Well, then, it will have to be arranged that the traveler shall meet with an accident on his journey."

"And Gritti?"

"We will speak of him another time. Permit me to lead you back to your guests."

The door of the hall opened and closed behind them.

Andrea could now leave his post without danger, but the words he had heard lamed him in mind and body. He arose with difficulty and staggered down the steps, his hand clutching at the dagger hidden in his coat. His lips were bleeding where his teeth had pressed them. But he had sufficient control to rejoin Smeraldina, to chat with her for a few moments, leave her the contents of his purse, and then ask her to lay the bridge to his window again. As he crossed the plank with a steady foot, a decision stood firm within his soul. It was time for action again; action that had for incentive not alone the great cause to which he had devoted himself. He must strike, and strike well, to save a friend from treachery, to send a son safe home to a waiting mother.

He walked softly through the corridor of his own house and out into the quiet street until he reached the little square in front of Leonora's palace. He had seen no waiting gondola anywhere, and concluded from this that the man he sought intended to go home on foot. The black shadow of a column near the door gave him sufficient shelter.

He stood here, his dagger firm in his hand, watching and waiting. In his heart and brain the vague voices that had troubled him before were alive again. Cold drops stood out on his forehead—with a sigh of relief he thought to himself that this might be the last time. It occurred to him that Malapiero would probably be accompanied by lackeys, and he was astonished at the feeling of relief it gave him to think that it would be useless to wait this time. But just as he was about to move from his shadow, the door of the palace opposite opened and a single stately figure wrapped in a cloak stepped out into the black night. White hair fell from under the hat rim, a quick, firm step beat the stone pavement as the belated wanderer kept close to the shadow of the houses. Now he had approached the blackness where stood the avenger; he had passed him ten or twenty steps;—suddenly he heard a footfall behind him; he turned, threw back his coat to free his sword, but in the

same moment he staggered and fell—the steel had struck to his heart.

"Mother! my poor mother!" groaned the murdered man. Then his head sank back on the pavement, and his eyes closed forever.

A deep silence followed the words. The dead man lay stretched across the street with arms outthrown. His hat had fallen back from his forehead, and under the disguise of the white wig curly brown hair appeared, the youthful face seemed sleeping in the pale night light. A step or two distant, the murderer stood leaning against the wall of the nearest house, his eyes staring wildly at the face opposite him; his tortured brain trying to pierce the spell of ghostly enchantment that seemed to hold it enthralled. *Must* he not see in this face the features of the old man he had watched a few moments before in Leonora's hall? Was it not just because of the man who lay here that he had struck the blow? And what was it that the man there had said as he fell? The blood rushed back from his head to his heart. His eyes, suddenly clearing, could plainly see the dagger in the dead man's breast. He read aloud the words on the handle, words that his own hand had graven in the steel: "Death to all Inquisitors!" The thoughts whirled through his brain in hideous haste. He suddenly understood—it was no miracle, this hideous thing that had happened. It was all quite natural. The boy had remained away from his enchantress throughout the day, but when evening came he could no longer resist the spell of the demon and had come to her door. At the portal they had told him that the countess was not alone, and he had turned to leave the house again. And then it was that his only friend in all the city had sprung upon him to murder him —to murder him because of the disguise which this very friend had advised!

The door of the palace opened again, and a tall figure wrapped in a cloak came out into the street. The light from the vestibule fell on the white hair of Ser Malapiero returning to his home. Andrea looked up, the horrible

irony of his position cutting deep into his soul. There walked the man from whom he had thought to free the city, to free the helpless, oppressed citizens, and to free his own friend. This man walked toward him alone, unguarded save in the mask of a secret which his enemy had penetrated—there was nothing to turn aside the dagger that was aimed for his heart—but this dagger was stained with innocent blood, the Judge and Avenger equally sinful with those whom he had condemned. There was no difference between them, except that the one had been impelled by evil chance, the others by evil intention.

All this whirled through Andrea's brain. He started up, drew the dagger from the wound and fled through the shadow before the aged Triumvir had seen him. As he ran, his heart was torn by the agony of the thought that Malapiero would find the dead man, and would breathe a thanks to the unknown murderer who had relieved him of a dangerous and difficult task.

. . . . .

It was long past midnight when a man sprang out of a gondola and knocked at the door of a lonely convent that stood on a little point of land far out beyond the city. In the convent dwelt a few Capuchin monks who lived on the charity of the surrounding fishermen, and in return gave them spiritual aid and comfort. The solitary man, Andrea Delfin, knocked more loudly at the door. A moment later a voice from within asked who it was.

"A dying man," he answered. "Call brother Pietro Maria if he is in the convent." The doorkeeper retired, and Andrea sat down on the stone bench beside the house, took a notebook from his pocket and began to write hastily.

This was what he wrote:

"*To Angelo Querine:* It is a doomed man who writes to you now, a doomed man to whom your noble deeds gave courage to dare to resist the tyranny which had crushed out his entire family. Do you remember young Candiano, who many years before was introduced to you in the Pa-

lazzo Morosini? I was then a young man living the customary life of pleasure of my kind, thinking neither of the past nor the future. It was you who first reminded me of the great deeds my forefathers had done in service of the State; it was you who first led me to study the history of my poor country and to understand how terribly this Republic of Venice had fallen, through a tyrant's hand, from her once high estate. Inspired by you, I won my brother Orso from his life of idle pleasure, and it was thus we drew down upon ourselves the vengeance of those who held the power.

"I will not trouble you with a recital of the means that were taken to crush out our family, as well as many others of the independent landed nobility. Enough to say that my brother died by poison, my sister perished in the flames that destroyed our home, and I was supposed to have shared her fate. But I had escaped, how I do not know, and by sheerest accident I had found papers belonging to one of my servants. This afforded me a possibility of allowing the belief in my death to spread abroad while I could sink my personality in that of another. My hair had grown white in a single night, my features aged as if by many years.

"When I recovered from the deep apathy into which the loss of all those dear to me had sunk me, I had but one thought, that of vengeance. Then came — I was living quietly in Brescia under the name of my servant — then came the news of your noble deed and its shameful defeat. I gathered my broken energy together, waited for a while to strengthen my hatred and my purpose, and then set forth to carry out in secret, by my own hand *alone*, the work which you could not perform by an open appeal to justice. I felt assured that there was no hatred in my soul for any one person, no desire for revenge for personal suffering, nothing but the sacred will to raise my hand in the avenging of the sorrows of my country.

"But it is for God alone to mete out vengeance—I would have played the judge and have become a murderer. I

took upon myself that which belonged alone to God, and God has punished me with my own weapons, and has allowed me to shed innocent blood. It is not yet time for a task such as mine—God has refused the sacrifice that I would bring him.

"I go now to meet the face of the Highest Judge, that he may pass judgment upon my sin and my suffering. I have nothing more to expect of mankind. Of you I pray only a passing pity for my error and my unhappiness.

"CANDIANO."

Long before the writer had finished, the door of the convent had opened and a venerable monk stood behind him. Andrea arose. "Pietro Maria," he said. "I thank you that you have answered my call. Will you grant one more request to an unhappy man, and take this letter safely to the exile in Venice? Will you promise me?"

"I promise you."

"God will reward you. Farewell."

He turned away without taking the hand the monk held out to him, entered his gondola and steered toward the open sea. The old man, who had hastily read the lines on the page before him, called after him in alarm and begged him to return, but received no answer. Greatly moved and excited, the venerable monk stood watching the last scion of a noble family pass out over the waves, which began to dance before the fresh morning breeze. When the gondola was near the gray horizon the dark figure in it rose to its feet, threw back a farewell look over land and sea, and toward the dim outlines of the city just visible above the mists of the lagoons. One moment it stood motionless, then with a spring it disappeared beneath the waves.

The monk who watched folded his hands and prayed silently. Then he loosened his boat from its chain and rowed out into the sea where the empty gondola danced on the crest of the waves. There was no trace of the man who had taken it out to this lonely spot.

Wilhelm Hauff

The Singer

I

"IT is a strange occurrence, truly," said Councilor Bolnau to a friend whom he met on Broad Street in B. "You must confess that this a queer age we live in."

"You mean the affair in the North?" answered his friend. "Have you important news, councilor? Has your friend, the foreign minister, told you some important secret of state?"

"Oh, don't bother me with politics or state secrets; let them go as they may. I mean now the affair of Mademoiselle Bianetti."

"The little singer? Has she been engaged again? They say the conductor of the orchestra has quarreled with her——"

"But for heaven's sake!" cried the councilor in astonishment, "where have you been hiding yourself that you do not know what all the city knows? Have you not heard what has happened to our little Bianetti?"

"Not a word, on my honor. What is it, then?"

"Nothing further than that she was stabbed to death last night."

The councilor was known as a great joker. When he made his usual morning promenade up and down Broad Street, it was his habit to stop his friends and tell them some wonderful story. This particular friend, therefore, was not much shocked at such terrible news. Instead, he answered calmly: "Is that all you know to-day, Bolnau? Your imagination must have given out if you exaggerate to this extent. When you stop me another time, have something

more sensible to tell me. Otherwise, I shall turn down another street if I see you in the distance."

"He won't believe me!" cried the councilor. "He won't believe me! If I had told you that the Emperor of Morocco had been stabbed, you would have received the news with gratitude and would have carried it further, because such news from Morocco is nothing unusual. But if they kill a singer here in B., nobody will believe it until they see the funeral. But, my dear friend, it is true this time, as true as that I am an honest man."

"Man! Think of what you are saying!" cried the friend in horror. "Dead, you say? Mademoiselle Bianetti dead?"

"She was not dead up to an hour ago, but I heard that she was in a very bad way."

"But tell me more, for mercy's sake! Are we in Italy, then, that people can be stabbed to death here in our city? Where is our police?—how could it have happened?"

"Don't scream so, good friend," replied Bolnau soothingly, "people are looking at us from the windows. How it happened, you ask? That is just the point—no one knows how it happened. Yesterday evening the young singer was at the masked ball, as charming and amiable as ever, and at twelve o'clock last night Court Physician Lange was awakened from a sound sleep and told that Signora Bianetti was dying of a knife wound. The whole city is talking of it—rank nonsense, of course. There are several circumstances which make it difficult to find out the truth. For instance, she will allow nobody to enter her house except the doctor and her own serving people. The court knows the news already, and the order has been given that the watch should not go through that street. The entire battalion makes the detour over the market place."

"You don't say so! But does no one know how it could have happened? Have they no clew at all?"

"It is difficult to pick out the truth among the many rumors that are going about. Our little Bianetti is a very decent girl, one must acknowledge. There is nothing that

could be said against her reputation. But people are malicious, particularly our dear ladies. If one mentions the respectable life the poor girl leads, they will shrug their shoulders and hint that they know of all sorts of things from her past. Her *past*, dear Lord! The child is scarce seventeen years old, and has been here for a year and a half. What chance is there for a past there?"

"Do not linger so long on the preface," interrupted his friend, "but come to the main theme of your story. Do they know who stabbed her?"

"Why, that is just the point, as I have already told you. People insist that it is some rejected lover, or else a jealous lover, who has tried to kill her. There are strange circumstances surrounding the case. They say that at the ball yesterday evening she was seen talking for some time with a masked man whom no one knew. She left the hall shortly after that, and there are those who claim to have seen that the man drove away with her in her carriage. This is all that anyone knows for a certainty. But I will soon find out how much truth there is to it."

"Yes, I know that you have your own channel for news. You have probably secured some one among those surrounding the signora who will keep you aware of everything that happens. People call you the city chronicler."

"Too much honor," laughed the councilor, and appeared flattered. "But this time I have no other spy than Dr. Lange himself. You must have noticed that, quite contrary to my usual custom, I am not promenading up and down the length of the street, but am confining myself to this block."

"I have noticed it, but I thought you were endeavoring to attract the eye of the fair Madame Baruch."

"Do not talk to me of the Baruchs! We broke off with them three days ago. My wife says that Madame Baruch plays for too high a stake. No, Dr. Lange comes through this street every day at twelve o'clock on his way to the Palace. I am standing here to catch him when he comes around the corner."

"Let me remain with you," said his friend; "I want to hear more about this affair."

"Oh, my dear friend, don't take the trouble to do that," replied Bolnau. "I know that you dine at twelve o'clock; do not allow your soup to grow cold. And, furthermore, Lange might not talk so freely before you. Meet me this afternoon in the café, and I will tell you everything. But go now—there he comes around the corner."

II

"I DO not consider the wound to be necessarily fatal," said Court Physician Lange, after the first greeting. "The knife was not held very securely in the hand that dealt the blow. She is conscious again, and, apart from the weakness which has followed the great loss of blood, there is no immediate danger."

The councilor put his arm through the doctor's, and answered: "I am very glad to hear that. I'll walk with you these few blocks to the Palace. But do you tell me something more about this affair. No one seems to know anything definite about the manner in which it happened."

"I can assure you," said the other, "the whole affair is shrouded in the deepest mystery. I had just fallen asleep when my Johann awakened me with the news that I had been sent for to come to some very sick person. I threw on my clothes and ran to the next room, where I found a pale and trembling girl who whispered to me that I was to bring bandages with me. This began to attract my attention. I entered the carriage hastily, told the maid to sit on the box with Johann to show him the way, and we drove to Lindenhof. I got down before a small house, and asked the maid who the sick person was."

"I can imagine how astonished you were——"

"When I heard that it was Signora Bianetti! I only knew her on the stage—had seen her there scarcely two or three times. But the mysterious way in which I had been

called to her, the bandages I was told to bring, all this aroused my curiosity greatly. We mounted a short stair and went through a narrow, dark hall. The maid led the way, left me there in the darkness a few moments, and then returned sobbing and even paler than before.

"'Come in, please, doctor,' she said. 'Alas! I fear you are come too late—she will not live through it.' I entered the room. It was, indeed, a terrible sight."

The physician was quiet a moment, his face darkening. He seemed to be looking at some picture which depressed him. "Well, and what did you see?" cried his companion, impatient at the interruption.

"I have seen many things in my life," continued the doctor, after a pause—"many things that have alarmed me, many things that have aroused my pity; but I have seldom seen anything that so touched my heart as did the sight that met my eyes there. In a dimly lighted room a pale young woman lay stretched out upon the sofa. An old servant knelt beside her, holding a cloth to her heart. I came nearer; the head of the dying woman lay thrown back, white and fixed as the head of a statue. Her long black hair, her dark eyebrows and lashes formed a terrifying contrast with the startling whiteness of her forehead, her face, and her beautiful rounded throat. The full folds of her white garments, which were doubtless part of her masquerade costume, were stained with blood. There was blood upon the floor and upon the sofa, blood that poured out from her heart in a crimson stream. This was what I saw in that first moment. Then I recognized that it was the singer Bianetti."

"Oh, how very touching!" said the councilor, much moved, and wiping his eyes with a large silk handkerchief. "She lay just like that a week ago when she sang 'Desdemona.' The effect was so alarmingly real, one could almost think that the Moor had really killed her. And to think that such a thing should in very truth happen to her!"

"Did I not forbid you to allow yourself to become ex-

cited?" interrupted the physician; "do you want to bring on another attack?"

"You are right," said the councilor, putting his handkerchief back in his pocket, "you are right—my constitution does not permit me any excitement. Continue to tell me what you know, and I will count the window panes in the War Office as we pass; that helps to calm me."

"If that doesn't help, you might take the second story of the Palace also.

"The old servant removed the cloth, and to my astonishment I saw a wound very near the heart, which had evidently been made by a knife or a dagger. There was no time to ask questions, however much I may have wished to do so. I examined the wound, and bound it up. During the operation the wounded girl had given no sign of life except that she had started and quivered when I probed the wound. I let her rest just as she lay, and watched her slumbers carefully."

"But the two serving maids—did you not question them about the wound?"

"You are my good friend, councilor; therefore I will confess to you that when I had bound up the wound and could do no more for the moment, I told the servants that I would do nothing more for the lady until they gave me some explanation as to what had happened."

"And what did they say?"

"That the singer came home shortly after eleven o'clock in company with a tall man who wore a mask. I may have shown some expression in my face at this news, for the two women began to weep, and implored me not to think ill of their young lady. They had been with her for some time, they said, and they had never seen any man enter the house after four o'clock in the afternoon. The young girl, who probably had been reading romances, said that the signora was an angel of purity."

"I would say that myself," said the councilor, busily counting the window panes in the Palace, which they were approaching. "I would say that myself. One can find

nothing to say against Signora Bianetti. She is a good, pious child. Is it her fault that she is beautiful, and that she must support herself by her singing?"

"You can believe me," replied Lange, "a physician can see deeply in these matters. One look at the pure features of the unhappy girl convinced me of her innocence far more than did the vows of her handmaiden. The latter, probably from curiosity as to this strange midnight visit, had remained near the door. She heard excited words pass between her mistress and the stranger, who had a deep, hollow voice. They spoke in French. The signora finally began to weep bitterly, and the man cursed horribly. Suddenly she heard a sharp scream in her mistress's voice. Alarmed at this, she opened the door, and the man in the mask rushed hastily past her and through the hall to the stairs. The maid followed him for a few steps, and heard a great noise at the bottom of the staircase—a noise as if he had fallen. She heard him groaning and moaning, but she was too terrified to go a step farther in that direction. She ran back into the room—there lay the lady covered with blood, her eyes closed as if she were dead. The girl was so alarmed that she did not know what to do at first. She awoke the old woman, told her to do what she could for their mistress, while she herself ran to fetch me——"

"And Signora Bianetti herself has said nothing? Did you not question her?"

"I went to the police station at once and awoke the commissioner. He ordered a search of all the taverns and of all dark corners of the city where criminals are wont to hide. No one had passed the gates in that last hour, and orders went out that anyone who passed after that should be examined. The owners of the little house, who lived in the upper story, did not even know of the affair until the police came to search their dwelling. It is quite incredible that the murderer could have escaped, for he must have injured himself severely in his fall down the stairs. The lower steps were stained with blood. It is likely that he wounded himself with his own dagger. It is still more

impossible to understand how he could have escaped, as the house door was closed. Signora Bianetti became conscious at ten o'clock this morning, and when examined by the chief of police, declared that she had no idea who the man in the mask could be. All physicians and surgeons are compelled, as you perhaps know, to report any such wounds at once to the authorities, to aid in the capture of the murderer. This is the affair as it stands now. But I am convinced that there is some deep secret here which the singer will not reveal. Signora Bianetti is not the sort of woman who would allow a strange man to accompany her home at that hour. Her handmaiden, who was present at the examination, seems to suspect something of the kind. For, when she saw that the signora did not intend to say anything, she herself said nothing about the quarrel she had heard, and threw me a look which seemed to implore me to be silent also. 'This is a terrible affair,' she said as she led me out to the stairway again, 'but nobody in the world can make me betray what my signora does not wish to have known.' Then she confessed something else to me, something which may throw light on this sad affair."

"Well—and may I not know what this something else is?" asked the councilor. "You see how curious I am. Do not keep me in suspense, if you do not wish me to have one of my attacks."

"Tell me, Bolnau, do you know whether there is anyone else of your name in this city? Or do you know of anyone of that name anywhere else in the world? And if you do, where is he and who is he?"

"I know of no one else in this town," answered Bolnau. "When I moved here about eight years ago, I was pleased to think that my name was not Meier, or Müller, or anything else that one finds by the dozen, causing great trouble and inconvenience. In Cassel I was the only man in my family. And I know of no other Bolnau in the whole world except my son, that unhappy music-mad fool. He has gone to America, I believe, and has disappeared altogether. But why do you ask this question, doctor?"

"Well, it can't be meant for you, councilor, and your son is in America; but it is already a quarter past twelve o'clock! Princess Sophie is ill, and here I stand chatting with you. Farewell and *au revoir*!"

"You don't move one step," cried Bolnau, holding the doctor's arm, "until you tell me what it was the girl said."

"I will, but you must not reveal it to a soul. The singer's last word, breathed just as she sank down unconscious, was—*Bolnau.*"

III

No one had ever seen Councilor Bolnau in so serious and gloomy a mood as he was after he had parted from Dr. Lange in front of the Palace. He was usually so cheery and bright when he made his morning promenade, and had such an amiable smile for all the ladies he met, such merry jokes for his men friends, that no one would have taken him to be sixty years old. He had, indeed, all possible cause for cheeriness. He had made a neat fortune for himself, had won the title of Councilor of Commerce, and then had retired to enjoy life in his pretty home in B. in company with a wife who was as fond of all good things as he was himself. He had one son, whom he had intended to make his successor in business. But the boy had but one interest, his love for music. All business, trading and commerce was hateful to him. The father had a hard, stubborn head; the son also. The father was apt to be violent and exaggerated in excitement; the son also.

When the son had just passed twenty, the father was fifty years old, and ready to retire and to leave his business to his son. But one fine summer evening the son disappeared, taking nothing with him but a few piano scores of his favorite operas. From England he wrote his father a friendly letter, saying that he was going to America. The councilor wished him good luck for his journey, and then moved his household to B.

The thought of this music-mad fool, as he dubbed his

son, rendered many an hour gloomy for him. He had told the boy never to show himself before him again; hence, he knew that he need never expect to see his son unless he sent for him. It seemed to him at times that he had been foolish to insist on putting the boy into trade. But years passed, and a busy life of pleasure gave him little time for sad thoughts. His days were spent in seeking for amusement, and if one wanted to behold him at his merriest, one could do it easily between eleven and twelve o'clock in Broad Street. There one could see a tall, thin man in modishly cut garments with a lorgnette and a riding whip, whose quick movements contrasted amusingly with his gray hairs. He bowed incessantly to the right and to the left, stopping every two paces to talk to some one and to laugh merrily. If one were a stranger and saw such a man at the hour named, one could be certain that it was Councilor Bolnau.

But to-day all was different. If the news of the sad accident to the singer had excited him, the doctor's last words threw him into a fright that almost lamed him. "Her last word before she became unconscious was *Bolnau*! She had spoken his honest name under such suspicious circumstances?" His knees trembled, his head drooped. "Bolnau!" he thought—"Bolnau, royal Councilor of Commerce! Suppose the singer were to die, and the maid-servant were to tell her secret! The police authorities would then know all about the murder, and all about this terrible last word. What could not a clever, ambitious lawyer make of this single word, some young man who was anxious to make a name by a *cause célèbre*?" The councilor put up his lorgnette and stared in despair at the prison, the gables of which he could just see in the distance. "That would be your goal, Bolnau. Perhaps they would make it a short term only, because of many years of faithful service to your country!"

He breathed heavily and loosened his cravat, then dropped his hand with a start of terror. Was not that the spot the rope encircled?—that the cold steel cut through?

If he met an acquaintance who bowed to him, he said to himself: "He knows about it already, and wants to show me that he understands." If another friend passed hastily without seeing him, then he was sure that this person knew also all about it and did not wish any further acquaintance with a murderer. A little more, and he would soon come to believe that he himself had really committed the murder. It was no wonder that he made a wide curve to avoid the police station. Might not the commissioner be standing at the window, see him, and call down to him, "Come up here a moment, I have a word to say to you"? He already felt a guilty trembling in all his limbs; he was already conscious of a desire to control all possible emotion in his face. Was it not he whom the unfortunate singer had accused with her last word?

Then he suddenly remembered that all this emotion was exceedingly bad for his health. He looked eagerly about for window panes to count, but the houses danced before his eyes, and the church steeple seemed to drop him a mocking courtesy. A terror of alarm seized him; he ran hastily through the streets until he sank down breathless in his own armchair. His first question, when he had come to himself again, was whether anyone from the police station had come to ask for him.

IV

When Dr. Lange came to see his patient that evening, he found her much better than he had hoped. He sat down beside her bed and began to talk with her about the unfortunate affair. She was resting one elbow on her pillows, while her delicate hand supported her beautiful head. Her face was still very pale; her great exhaustion seemed to give her but one charm the more, and her dark eyes had lost nothing of their expressiveness, nothing of the fire which had attracted the doctor, even though he was no longer in those years where imagination heightens beauty.

He said to himself that he had seldom seen so sweet a face. Her features were not regular, but there was a harmony, a charm about them for which he could not find the reason at first. But his eyes, experienced in reading the soul, soon saw that it was the nobility, the purity of her spirit, which shed such a radiance over her virginal beauty. "You seem to be studying my features, doctor," said the singer, smiling. "You sit there so quiet looking at me, and you seem to forget what I have just asked you. Or perhaps you do not wish to give the answer. May I not know what people say about my misfortune?"

"Why should you wish to hear all the foolish gossip started by idle tongues? I was just thinking how pure your soul shines out from your eyes. You have found peace within yourself; what, therefore, do you care for the opinions of others?"

"You are evading me," she answered. "You wish to avoid giving me an answer by paying me compliments. Why should I not care for the opinion of others? What honest girl may dare to ignore the society in which she lives—may dare to say that it is of no importance to her what people say about her? Or do you believe, perhaps," she continued more gravely, "that I do not care about the gossip because I belong to a profession in which the world has little confidence? Confess that you take me to be as careless as some of the others!"

"Most assuredly not. I have never heard anything but good said about you, Signora Bianetti. What else would there be but good to say of your quiet, retired life, and of your calm reserve when you do go out into the world? But why do you insist upon knowing what they say now? As your physician, I may not think that it is yet time to tell you."

"Oh, please, doctor—please do not torture me like this," she cried. "I can read in your eyes that it is no good thing they say of me now. Do you not think that this uncertainty is far worse for me than the truth could be?"

The doctor saw the truth of this last remark, and he

feared also that during his absence some gossiping woman might intrude upon his patient and tell her worse things than he would say.

"You know the people here," he began. "B. is quite a city, but when an event of this kind happens we learn how provincial we still are. It is true that everyone in the city is talking about you now, but you cannot be surprised at that. And as nothing definite is known, why then—why then, they invent all sorts of things. For instance, this masked man to whom you were seen talking at the ball, and who without doubt is the person who committed this deed, they say that he is——"

"Well, what do they say?" begged the singer in excitement. "Please tell me."

"They say that it is some former lover who knew you in some other city, and who tried to kill you because of jealousy."

"They can say that! Oh, how miserable I am!" she cried in emotion, while tears shone in her beautiful eyes. "How hard people are toward a poor unprotected girl. But tell me more, doctor, tell me more! You are keeping something from me, I know it. What other city do they say was it that——"

"Signora, I should have thought that you had more self-control!" said Lange, alarmed at the excitement of his patient. "In truth I am sorry that I have already said so much. I would not have said even this had I not feared that some one else might do so."

The singer dried her tears hastily. "I will be very quiet," she said with a sad smile. "I will be as quiet as a good child. I will try to think that all these people who are now condemning me were applauding me. And now tell me more, dear good doctor, tell me more!"

"Oh, well, these idle tongues say stupid things," continued the physician reluctantly. "It seems that the other evening, when you appeared in 'Othello,' there was a strange nobleman here visiting some one in the city. He is said to have recognized you and to have declared that

about two years ago he saw you in Paris in exceedingly bad company—but, dear me—you are so pale——"

"No, no, the lamp is growing dim; tell me more!"

"This talk went about in the higher circles only at first, but a little later it leaked out, and the general public seemed to know of it. Now that this affair has occurred, people are trying to connect the two, and they say that the crime has something to do with your former life in Paris."

The expressive features of the sick girl had changed from deepest pallor to flaming red during the last sentences. She had raised herself up in bed as if she would not lose a word of it, her eyes rested hotly upon the mouth of her physician, she scarcely seemed to breathe. "Ah, now it is all over!" she cried, while tears burst from her eyes. "If *he* should hear this, it would be too much for his jealous nature. Why did I not die yesterday? Then I should have been with my good father and my sweet mother—they would have comforted me, and I should not have known the scorn of these cruel people!"

The doctor was still pondering over these strange words, and was seeking some comfort to give her, when the door flew open hastily and a tall young man rushed in. His face was very handsome, but his features were darkened by an expression of wild defiance; his eyes rolled, his hair hung loose around his forehead. He had a large roll of music in one hand, with which he gesticulated violently before he could find breath to speak. The singer cried out at his entrance. The doctor thought at first that her scream was one of fear; but he saw in a moment that it was joy, for a sweet smile had parted her lips and her eyes shone through the tears.

"Carlo!" she cried. "Carlo! Are you come at last to see me?"

"Miserable woman!" cried the young man, stretching his arm, with the roll of music, majestically toward her. "Let me hear no more of your siren song. I am come—to judge you!"

"Oh, Carlo!" interrupted the singer, her voice as soft

and sweet as the tones of a flute. "How can you speak so to your Giuseppa!"

The young man was apparently preparing an answer, when the doctor, who found this scene much too exciting for his patient, intervened between them. "My dear Mr. Carlo," he said, offering him his snuff-box, "would you kindly remember that mademoiselle is in no condition to have her nerves played upon in such manner?"

The stranger turned wide eyes on him, and pointing the roll at him inquired, in a deep, threatening voice, "Who are you, earthworm, that you dare intervene between me and my anger?"

"I am Court Physician Lange," replied the latter, closing his snuff-box. "And among my several titles there is nothing about an earthworm. I am master here as long as the signora is ill, and I tell you in all kindness that I will put you out unless you modulate your *presto assai* to a respectable *larghetto*."

"Oh, do not worry him, doctor," cried the sick woman anxiously. "Do not make him angry. Carlo is my friend —he will not harm me, whatever evil tongues may have told him concerning me."

"Ha! You dare to mock me? But know, miserable creature, the lightning has burst the door of your secret, and illumined the night in which I have been walking! Was it because of this that you would not let me know where you came from? who you were? For this reason, therefore, did you close my mouth with kisses when I would ask about your past life? Fool that I am, to let myself be charmed by a woman's voice, although I knew that it is but deception and falsity. Only in the song of man is there truth and strength. *Ciel!* How could I let myself be carried away by the roulades of a worthless creature!"

"Oh, Carlo!" whispered the invalid, "if you only knew how your words wound my heart! Your suspicions strike deeper than did the murderer's steel!"

The stranger laughed a harsh laugh. "Ah, yes, indeed, my fair dove! You would wish your lovers deaf and blind,

would you not? This Parisian must have been a clever fellow to find you again so soon."

"This is too much!" cried the doctor, catching the other by the arm. "You leave this room at once or I will call up the janitor of the house to put you out with violence."

"I'm going, earthworm, I'm going!" cried the stranger, pushing the doctor gently down into an armchair. "I am going, Giuseppa, never to return again! If you die, miserable woman, hide your soul in some corner where I can never meet you! I would curse Heaven if I must share it with you!—you have robbed me so cruelly of my love, of my very life!" He gesticulated again with the roll of music, but his wildly rolling eye was dim with tears as he threw a last look at the sick girl and then rushed sobbing from the room.

"Oh, follow him, stop him!" cried the singer. "Bring him back, or I shall never be happy again!"

"No, indeed, my dear young lady," replied Dr. Lange, getting up out of his armchair. "We must have no more such scenes here. I will prescribe for you some soothing drops, which you must take every hour."

The poor girl had sunk back in her cushions and had fainted again. The doctor called a servant and they worked together to restore the patient to her senses. During this time the doctor could not resist the temptation to scold the serving maid. "Did I not tell you that nobody should be allowed to enter this room? And here you let this crazy man in, who was near being the death of your young lady!"

"I didn't let anybody in," answered the girl, sobbing. "But I couldn't refuse *him*. Signora sent me to his house three times already to-day to implore him to come to her, if only for a moment. I was to say that she was dying and that she must see him once more before her death."

"Indeed? And who is this——"

The sick woman opened her eyes. She looked first at the doctor then at her servant, then her eyes wandered uneasily about the room. "He is gone, he is gone forever," she

whispered weakly. "Oh, dear doctor, please go to Bolnau!"

"For mercy's sake, what do you want of my poor old councilor? This affair has already thrown him on a sick bed. How could he possibly help you?"

"I made a mistake," she said. "I meant you should go to my friend, the foreign orchestra leader. His name is Boloni, and he lives in the Hotel de Portugal."

"I remember having heard about him," said the doctor. "But what shall I say to him when I see him?"

"Tell him that I will explain everything if he will only come once more—but no, I could never tell him myself—would *you* tell him, doctor? I have such confidence in you—if I told you everything, you would explain it to him, would you not?"

"I am quite at your disposal, and will do everything I can to ease your mind."

"Then come back to-morrow morning. I do not feel able to talk any more to-day. And one thing more. Babette, give the doctor his handkerchief."

The servant opened a cupboard and handed the doctor a handkerchief of yellow silk which exhaled a strong but pleasant perfume.

"This is not mine," said the doctor. "I use only linen handkerchiefs. You have made a mistake in the owner."

"But that is impossible, sir," replied the girl. "We found it on the floor last night. It does not belong to any of us, and no one has been here but yourself."

The doctor's eyes met those of his patient, which were resting in anxious expectation on his face. "Could not this belong to—some one else?" he asked firmly.

"Show it to me," she replied anxiously. "I had not thought of that." She examined the cloth and found a monogram in one corner. Her cheek paled and she began to tremble.

"You seem to know that name. You perhaps know also the person who has lost this handkerchief?" continued Lange. "It might be of use to us; may I take it with me?"

Giuseppa seemed fighting with herself for a decision. Finally she said: "Take it! Even if the terrible man should come once more, and better strike my suffering heart this time—even then! Take it, doctor. To-morrow I will explain this handkerchief and other things to you."

V.

It is easy to imagine how completely this affair occupied the thoughts of Dr. Lange. His extensive practice was as much of a burden to him now as it had hitherto been a delight. The many other visits he was obliged to make kept him away from the singer until quite late the following morning, in spite of his impatience to be at her bedside. But these visits were not quite an unmixed evil, for in all the different houses he could listen to what was being said about Signora Bianetta. And he hoped also to be able to learn something more about her strange lover, Boloni.

The opinions as to the singer were not very favorable. The judgment was all the harsher because the gossips were angry at not being able to hear anything definite about the matter. And what young and beautiful maiden, who is also successful as an artist, has not many enemies made by envy? The strange musician was little known in the city. He had come to B. a little less than a year ago, and lived very quietly in a small upper room in his hotel. He seemed to be making a living by giving singing lessons and composing music. All those who knew him seemed to think that he was just a little crazy. But the few who had become his friends spoke of him as being very interesting, and some of them went regularly to the Hotel de Portugal for supper, to be able to listen to his delightful conversation on musical subjects. Boloni seemed to have no relatives or no intimate friends here. People did not seem to suspect his relations with the singer Bianetti.

Councilor Bolnau was still ill in bed. He was much depressed, and spoke incessantly of things which usually did

not interest him at all. He had bought a collection of law books which he was eagerly studying. His wife said that he had read throughout the preceding night, and that she had heard him moaning. His study was particularly directed toward the subject of the unjustly accused, especially such of them as had been executed, although quite innocent. He told his friend the doctor that there was much comfort in the slowness of law proceedings in Germany, for if a suit lasted ten years or more it was safer for those who were really innocent, than in places where they arrested you one day and hanged you the next.

When the doctor finally reached the home of the singer Bianetti, he found his patient much depressed and very unhappy. Her wound appeared to be healing well, but with her growing physical health the calmness of her soul seemed to be vanishing. "I have been thinking over all these things," she said. "Is it not strange, doctor, that you should have come into my life in this peculiar way? Two days ago I scarcely knew of your existence. And now that I am so unhappy, I have found a kind, fatherly friend in you."

"Mademoiselle Bianetti," replied Lange, "the physician has more to do by the sick bed than merely to feel the pulse, to bind up wounds and to prescribe medicines. Believe me, when we sit alone by our patient, when we hear the inner pulse, the pulse of the soul, beating so uneasily, when we know that there are wounds to heal which cannot be seen—then the physician is lost in the friend, and we see anew the wonderful interrelation between body and soul."

"Yes, indeed, that is it!" said Giuseppa, taking his hand. "That is it, and my soul also has found its physician in you. You may have to do much for me; you may even have to appear in the courts in my name. If you are willing to make this great sacrifice for a poor girl who has no one else, then I will tell you everything."

"You may depend upon me for everything," said the kind old man, pressing her hand warmly.

"But think well before you promise! The world has

cast a slur upon my reputation; it has accused, judged, and condemned me. Will it not throw scorn upon you when you take the part of the maligned singer, of the friendless foreigner?"

"I am not afraid," cried the doctor ardently. "And now tell me your story."

VI

The singer began: "My father was Antonio Bianetti, a celebrated violinist, whose name you may have heard, as his travels led him through many countries. I can remember him only from my very earliest childhood, when he taught me the scales. My mother was an excellent singer, and accompanied my father on his travels, appearing with him at his concerts. I was four years old when my father died on one of his journeys, and left us in great poverty. My mother was obliged to support us by her singing. A year later she married a musician who had been very flattering in his compliments and attentions. But she soon saw that he had married her only to utilize her voice. He became musical director in a little city in Alsatia, and then our sorrows began.

"My mother had three more children and lost her voice completely. This cut off the better part of my stepfather's income, for it was my mother's singing which had been the main attraction at his concerts. He was very cruel to her after this, and even refused me proper food until he hit upon a means of making me useful. He forced me to sing many hours each day, teaching me the most difficult music, and he made of me one of those unfortunate infant prodigies to whom nature has given a beautiful talent to their own misfortune. My mother could not endure the sight of my suffering. She seemed to be fading away, and we found her dead in bed one morning. What shall I tell you of the years that followed, years of martyrdom for me? I was but eleven years old, and had to attend to the housekeeping,

to educate the smaller children, and to learn the songs for my concerts. It was indeed a time of torture!

"During these years a strange gentleman would come to visit us occasionally, bringing with him a bag full of money for my father. Even now I shiver when I think of him. He was a tall gaunt man of about middle age. The piercing glance of his small gray eyes cannot be forgotten by anyone who has seen him. He seemed to be particularly fond of me. He praised my size, my face, my figure, and my singing. In spite of my protests he would take me on his knee and kiss me, with the words: 'Two or three years more, and you will be ready, little one!' and then he and my stepfather would burst into a wild, coarse laugh. On my fifteenth birthday my stepfather said to me: 'Listen, Giuseppa! You have nothing, you are nothing, and you need expect nothing from me. I have enough to do to care for my own three. Little Christel can now take your place as infant prodigy. All you have—your singing—you have me to thank for, and that must help you to get along in the world. But your uncle in Paris has promised to take you into his house.' 'My uncle in Paris?' I cried in astonishment, for I had never heard of any such person. 'Yes, your uncle in Paris. He may be here any day.'

"You can perhaps imagine how delighted I was at this. It is now three years ago, but I can still remember the happiness of those hours as clearly as if it were but yesterday. It was almost too much happiness to think of the chance of escape from my stepfather's house, to think of an uncle kind enough to take pity on me, and also to think of going to Paris, which had always seemed to me the home of brightness and pleasure. Finally, one evening, a carriage stopped at our door. 'That is your uncle,' said my father. I ran downstairs, threw open the door—what a terrible disappointment awaited me! It was the man with the bags of money.

"I was almost unconscious from fright and disappointment, but I cannot forget the ghastly joy that shone out of his gray eyes when he saw how tall I had grown. I

can still hear his hoarse voice in my ears: 'Ah. now you are ready, my dear! Now I can introduce you into the great world.' He took me by the hand, and threw the bag which he carried on the table. A shower of gold and silver pieces rolled out of it, and my father cried aloud with joy, while the smaller children crawled about picking up the money that had fallen to the floor. It was the price of my body and soul!

"The following day we set out for Paris. The gaunt man (I could not bring myself to call him uncle) talked to me incessantly of the brilliant part I should play in his *salons*. I could not feel any pleasure in it; a strange fear had taken the place of all my joy and happiness. We reached Paris at last, and our carriage stopped before a large brilliantly lighted house. Ten or twelve very pretty girls danced down the broad staircase to meet us. They embraced and kissed me, and called me their sister Giuseppa. I asked the man, 'Are these all your daughters, sir?' 'Yes, they are all my good children,' he answered, laughing, and the girls and the many servants standing about also laughed loudly.

"The magnificent apartments and the beautiful garments that were given me distracted my troubled mind a little. The following evening I was most beautifully dressed and led into the drawing-room. The twelve girls, also magnificently attired, sat about at card tables and on sofas. They were carrying on a lively conversation with a number of gentlemen of varying ages. When I appeared they all stopped talking and looked at me. The owner of the house led me to the piano and told me to sing. When I had finished they all applauded enthusiastically. Some of them began to talk to me, and appeared much entertained by my awkward French, which was half Italian. They paid me many compliments, and I blush now to think of some of the words they said. My life went on thus for several days very pleasantly. No one troubled me, I could do as I chose, I had everything I wished for, and I might have been quite content had I not felt that strange fear of

this house and of these people. I would try to explain it by my own ignorance, saying to myself that this was the great world, and that I should learn to grow accustomed to its ways.

"And now, dear doctor, look at this insignificant little bit of paper. To it I owe my rescue. I found it one morning on my breakfast tray, hidden beneath a roll. I do not know what kind hand laid it there, but may heaven forever bless the writer of it, who had taken pity on me before it was too late! In the letter were the words:

"'Mademoiselle

"'This house in which you live has the worst possible reputation. The women who surround you are unfit companions for any good girl. Should we have been mistaken in believing Giuseppa innocent of this knowledge? Is she willing to purchase a short time of pleasure with many years of repentance?'

"It was terrible news, for it suddenly, almost too suddenly, tore aside the happy veil of childish innocence that had rested over my soul—and it destroyed all my hopes for the future. What was I to do? I was still too young to have learned to make important decisions for myself. The man to whom this house belonged appeared to me like an evil magician who was able to read all my thoughts, who might indeed already know that I had learned the truth. And yet I would rather have died than stay a moment longer in that house. I had heard a girl in the house opposite ours speaking Italian now and then. I did not know her—but did I know anyone else in this great city? The sounds of my own language awoke confidence in me! I would flee to her and on my knees I would implore her to save me.

"It was but seven o'clock in the morning. Following the habits of my childhood I was accustomed to rise early, and it was this that saved me. At such an hour everyone in the house, even to the majority of the servants, was still asleep. Only the concièrge might possibly see me, but

he was not likely to imagine that anyone could wish to escape. I dared the attempt. Throwing a plain dark cloak about me, I hurried down the stairs and slipped past the man at the door without his noticing me. Three steps more and I was free.

"Across the street to the right lived the Italian girl. I sprang across the roadway and knocked at the door. When the servant opened it I asked for the signora with the dark curls, who could speak Italian. The man laughed and said I probably meant her excellency, the young Countess Seraphina. 'Yes, yes,' I exclaimed, 'please lead me to her quickly!' He seemed to hesitate at first for it was still so early, but my entreaties won him over. He led me up to a room in the second story, told me to wait there and called a serving maid whom he told to announce me to her excellency. I had thought that the pretty Italian girl was some one of my own class in life; I felt almost ashamed to have to tell my story to a young lady of such position. But I had no time for hesitation; the maid returned in a moment to lead me to the bed of her young mistress. It was indeed the beautiful young lady whom I had heard speaking Italian. I fell on my knees before her and implored her protection. When she had heard my story she was much moved, and promised to save me. She sent for the man who had let me into the house, and commanded him to say nothing to anyone about my being there. She told them to give me a little room, the windows of which opened on to the court. She had my food sent to me there, gave me some sewing to occupy my mind, and I lived there for several days, full of joy over my rescue mingled with anxiety for my future.

"The house to which I had fled was the home of the ambassador of a small German court. Her excellency was his niece, a young Italian countess, who was completing her education in Paris. She was a most kind and amiable creature, whose benevolence to me I shall never forget. She came to see me every day and tried to comfort me. She told me that her uncle had sent his servants on a

secret investigation of the house opposite. The occupants of it were in great alarm at my disappearance, but they were anxious that no word of it should be spread abroad. The servants whispered among themselves that one of the young ladies had thrown herself from a window of the second story into the canal. It happened that my room had been on a corner, one window looking out upon the street, the other down on to the canal which flowed past the house. I remember to have opened the window on that side the morning of my escape; it had probably remained open, and in this way my disappearance was apparently explained. Signora Seraphina was just about to return to Italy, and she was kind enough to take me with her. She did even more than this: she persuaded her parents to take me into their home in Piacenza. She engaged masters to perfect my talent. I have to thank her for my art, for my freedom, for my life itself, perhaps.

"It was in Piacenza that I became acquainted with the musical director, Carlo Boloni. In spite of his name, however, he is not an Italian. He seemed to love me, but he did not declare himself to me there. Soon after making his acquaintance I accepted the engagement at this theater. People have been kind to me here; the public has seemed to admire me. My manner of life and my reputation have been unspotted by any calumny. In all these months no man has ever visited me except—I can confess our beautiful relations to you without a blush—except Boloni, who soon followed me here. Now you have heard my story. Tell me candidly, do you think that I have done anything to deserve such bitter punishment? How have I sinned that this terrible thing should happen to me?"

When the singer had finished talking, the physician took her hand and pressed it warmly. "I am very happy," he said, "to join the little company of those who have been good to you. It is not much that I can do, it is out of my power to help you to the extent that the kind young countess has done, but I will try to do what can be done

to clear up the matter here; and I will also endeavor to bring about a reconciliation with your hot-tempered friend. But tell me, what nationality is this Signor Boloni?"

"Now you are asking me too much," she answered evasively. "All I know is that he is of German birth, and I have understood that he left his home because of a family quarrel. He has been in England and in Italy, and has been here less than a year."

"But why haven't you told him the story you have told me just now?"

Giuseppa blushed at the question. She looked down as she answered: "You are my physician, my fatherly friend. When I speak to you I feel as a child might feel when confiding in its father. But how could I speak to a young man about such things? I know his jealous temperament, his easily excited nature. I would never dare to tell him of this terrible snare that I have escaped."

"I honor and admire your feelings, my dear child. Believe me, it does an old man good to find such delicacy of scruple in these days, when it seems to be considered good form to forget all scruple. But you have not told me all. That evening at the ball, that terrible night?"

"It is true, I have still more to tell you. Whenever I thought back over my rescue, I would send up silent thanks to Heaven that my good fortune had led me to such kind people. And also did I praise Heaven that, in that terrible house from which I had escaped, they believed me to be dead. For I knew that if that dreadful man had any suspicion that I was still alive, he would come to drag back his victim, or to kill her. For he had doubtless given my father much money for me. Therefore, as long as I was in Piacenza I would not accept any of the many favorable offers I received to make a public appearance. But one day, when I had been there about a year and a half, Countess Seraphina showed me a Paris newspaper in which I read the announcement of the death of the Chevalier de Planto."

"Chevalier de Planto?" interrupted the physician.

"Was that the name of the man who took you from your stepfather's house?"

"Yes, that was what he was called. This news from Paris made me very happy and took away the last obstacle to a public appearance, and to the possibility of my no longer being a burden to my benefactors. A few weeks later I came here to B. Two days ago, as you know, I went to the ball, and I will confess to you that I was in a very happy mood. I had not told Boloni what costume I was to wear. I wished to tease him and then surprise him. But suddenly, as I chanced to be standing alone, a voice whispered in my ear, 'Seppa, how is your uncle?' It was like a clap of thunder. I had not heard that name since the day I had escaped from that terrible man. 'My uncle?' I had no uncle, and there was but one who had passed for my uncle in the eyes of the world, the Chevalier de Planto. I could scarcely control myself sufficiently to reply, 'You must be mistaken.' I attempted to hurry away and hide myself in the crowd, but the stranger pushed his arm through mine and held me fast. 'Seppa,' he whispered, 'I warn you that you had better walk quietly along with me, or else I will tell all these good people of the company you once kept.' I was crushed, everything looked black before my eyes—I seemed to have but one thought, a terrible fear of shame. What could a poor helpless girl do, when this stranger, whoever he might be, could tell the world such things of me? It would have been only too readily believed, and Carlo, alas! would not have been the last to accept it as true and to condemn me. Helplessly I followed the man at my side. He whispered dreadful things to me. He told me that I had rendered my uncle, my stepfather, most unhappy, that I had ruined my entire family. When I could endure it no longer I tore myself away and called for my carriage. But as I looked back once more on the staircase the dreadful stranger was behind me. 'I will drive home with you, Seppa,' he said with a hoarse laugh. 'I have a few words more to say to you.' I must have fainted, for I remember nothing very

clearly until the carriage stopped before this house. I entered my room; he followed me and began to talk to me at once. In deadly terror that he would betray me, I told Babette to leave the room. 'What do you want of me, wretch?' I cried in anger. 'What evil can you say of me? It was without my own consent that I entered that house, and I left it as soon as I saw what I had to expect there.'

"'Do not make a scene, Seppa. There are but two ways to save yourself. Either you pay me ten thousand francs at once, in jewels or in gold, or you follow me to Paris. You must do one of these things, or the whole city will know more about you than you would like.' I was beside myself with rage and horror. 'Who gives you the right to make such demands of me?' I cried. 'Tell them if you must, but leave my house this instant or I will call the neighbors!'

"I made several steps toward the window, but he followed me and caught my arm. 'Who gives me the right?' he repeated. 'Your father, my dear, your father.' A horrible laugh burst from his lips, the light of the candles fell upon a pair of piercing gray eyes, and I knew who it was that I saw before me. I knew that his death had been only a pretense, a lie spread abroad for some evil purpose. Despair gave me strength. I tore myself from his hold and endeavored to snatch off his mask. 'I know you, Chevalier de Planto!' I cried, 'and you must answer before the Court of Justice for your treatment of me!' 'Not too fast, my darling,' he said, and as he spoke I felt the steel in my heart—I believed myself dying."

The doctor shivered. It was a bright day, and yet he felt the shudder one experiences when speaking of ghosts in the dark. It seemed to him that he could hear the hoarse laugh of this Satan, that he could see the monster's piercing gray eyes behind the curtains of the bed. "Then you believe," he said after a few moments, "that the chevalier is not dead, and that it is he who attempted to murder you?"

"His voice, his eyes, tell me that it was he. The handkerchief I gave you yesterday makes it quite certain. It had his initials in the corner."

"And will you give me authority to act for you? May I tell in court what you have told me now?"

"I have no other choice; you may tell everything. But first, dear doctor, please go to Boloni and tell him what I have told you. He will believe you; he knows Countess Seraphina also."

"And may I not also know," continued the physician, "the name of the ambassador in whose house you were hidden?"

"Why not? it was Baron Martinow."

"Baron Martinow?" cried Lange in pleasant excitement. "He who was in the diplomatic service of Prince X——?"

"You know him? He was the ambassador of the prince's court in Paris, and later in St. Petersburg."

"Oh, that is very good, very good!" said the physician, rubbing his hands joyfully. "I know him, and he is in this very town, having arrived yesterday. He sent for me this morning; he has taken rooms in the Hotel de Portugal."

A tear shone in the singer's eyes, and she appeared much moved. "What a happy chance!" she exclaimed. "I had imagined him many hundred miles away, and now he is here; and he can bear witness to the truth of my story. Oh, hurry to him—and oh! if Carlo could only be with you when he assures you that I have told the truth!"

"He shall be with me. I will drag him there, depend upon me. And now, my dear child, farewell for to-day. You may be quite calm, fate will be kind to you once more, I know. And be sure that you take the medicine I left for you, two spoonfuls every hour."

The doctor left the room, looking back to receive another grateful glance from his patient. She seemed calm and happy. It was as if the narration of her story had

lifted a heavy weight from her soul. She looked with confidence to the future, for a more fortunate fate seemed dawning for her.

VII

Baron Martinow, for whom Dr. Lange had done an important service some years before, welcomed him gladly and told him all he wished to know about the singer Bianetti. The baron not only corroborated the truth of her story, but he was enthusiastic in his praise of her character. He promised to talk about her in this way to everyone whom he should meet in the city, and to refute the rumors that were in circulation. He kept his promise, and his high position, and his open praise of the Italian singer caused a complete reversion of opinion in her favor within a few days. But Dr. Lange, when he had finished his visit to the ambassador, mounted a few stories higher in the hotel to No. 54, the room where the musician lived. He stood before the door for an instant to get his breath, for the steep stairs had fatigued him. Then he listened, for he heard strange sounds behind the door. There seemed to be some one seriously ill within the room; he heard sighs and deep groans, mingled with dreadful French and Italian curses, and now and then a hoarse, despairing laugh. The physician shuddered. He remembered that the musician's excitability of the day before had seemed to him almost like insanity. Could he have gone altogether mad through sorrow? Dr. Lange's hand was already raised to knock at the door when he noticed that it was No. 53, and he recognized with relief that he had made a mistake. When he stopped before No. 54, he heard sounds of a different character. A man's voice, rich and sweet, was singing to the accompaniment of a piano. The doctor entered and found the young man he had seen in the singer's house the day before.

Guitars, violins, loose strings, and sheets of music lay scattered about the room. In the midst of it all stood the

musician in a loose black dressing-gown, a red cap on his head, and a roll of music in his hands. Dr. Lange said later that all he could think of was Marius amid the ruins of Carthage.

The young man seemed to remember him, and his welcome was a gloomy one. But he was polite enough to push a pile of music from a chair, which he then offered to his visitor. He himself walked about the room with long steps, the flying tails of his dressing-gown taking the dust neatly off the tables and books.

He did not give the visitor time to say a word, but began at once: "You come from her? Aren't you ashamed, with your gray hairs, to be the messenger of a woman like that? I will hear nothing more of her. I have buried my happiness, I am mourning for my dead love. You see I am wearing my black dressing-gown. If you have any understanding of the workings of the soul, this should prove to you that that woman is dead for me. Oh, Giuseppa!"

"Honored sir," interrupted the doctor, "if you will but hear me——"

"Hear? What do you know about hearing? Let me try your ear, old man! Listen now, this is Woman," he continued, throwing open the top of the piano and playing something which seemed to the physician, who had no great knowledge of music, to be very much like other tunes he had heard. "Do you hear how soft this is, how melting, how clinging? But do you not notice also in these intervals the unreliable, fickle character of these creatures? But now listen—" He raised his voice and his eyes shone as he threw back the wide sleeves of his mourning garment—"Where men are gathered, there is power and truth! Here there is nothing impure, here are truly noble and beautiful tones!" He pounded about on the keys with great energy, but it seemed to the doctor that this also was like most other music he had heard.

"You have rather a peculiar manner of characterizing people," said the doctor. "As we are in the business, might

I ask you to show me what a court physician would sound like on a piano?"

The musician looked at him with scorn. "How dare you, earthworm, interrupt my brilliant and magnificent harmonies with your squeaky C sharp?"

The physician's answer was interrupted by a knocking at the door. A crooked little man entered, bowed deeply and said: "The sick gentleman in No. 53 begs the honored director not to make so much noise, for he is very weak and probably very near his passing away from this earth."

"I send my most obedient respects to the gentleman," replied the young man. "As far as I am concerned he may pass away from this earth as soon as he chooses. He keeps me awake all night with his moaning and his groaning, and he makes me shiver with his godless curses and his horrible laugh. Does this Frenchman imagine that he owns the hotel? If I disturb him, so he disturbs me also."

"But your honor will forgive me," said the little man. "He'll not last much longer, you wouldn't disturb his last moments——"

"Is the gentleman so ill?" asked the physician in sympathy. "What is the matter with him? Who is taking care of him? And who is he?"

"I do not know who he is, for I am hired to care for him in the hotel by the day. I think he calls himself Lorier, and comes from France. He was all right day before yesterday, only a little melancholy. He did not go out at all, and did not seem to want to see the sights of the city. But then I found him very ill in bed one morning, and he said that he had had an apoplectic stroke during the night. But he won't let me bring him a physician, and he curses me when I say I will fetch one. He takes care of himself, and bandages himself. I think he has some old wound from the war, which has opened again."

Just then they heard the hoarse voice of the sick man next door calling amid curses. The little lackey crossed himself and hurried away.

The doctor began again at his task of bringing the stubborn lover to reason, and this time with more success. The musician had taken up an opera score, and was gently humming portions of it. The physician took advantage of this quieter mood, and began to tell the story the singer had told him yesterday. His host did not seem to pay any attention to him at first. He read his score as absorbedly as if he were alone in his room. But gradually he began to take notice, and now and then stopped singing. He would then raise his eye from his book and glance at his visitor. Finally, he dropped the score altogether and gazed at the speaker. His eyes shone, he moved nearer, and snatched at the arm of the doctor. When the latter had finished his narrative, the young musician sprang up and ran excitedly about the room. "Yes," he exclaimed, "it sounds like truth; there is a gleam of truth in it—it may possibly be as you say. But, by Satan! might it not also be all a lie?"

"Why such sudden *decrescendo*, honored artist? Why jump from truth to lies at one leap? And if I bring you a witness for the truth—what then, my maestro?"

Boloni stood before him looking down at him. "Ah, if you could do this! I would frame you in gold! This thought alone demands a royal reward. Ah! if we could find a witness—but it is all so black around me—a tangled labyrinth—no escape—no guiding star——"

"Most honored friend," interrupted the doctor, "that sounds to me very much like some lines from Schiller's 'Robbers.' But in spite of it I do know such a witness, such a guiding star."

"Ah! bring him to me!" cried the other. "He shall be my friend, my angel, my God—I will worship him!"

"Now you are leaving out something. I seem to remember some words about a burning sword there. But I can convince you of my good will. The ambassador who received poor Giuseppa into his house happens by a lucky chance to be in this hotel occupying the first-floor suite. If you will condescend to put on a coat and a cravat, I will

lead you to him. He has promised to give you all the assurance you need."

The young man pressed the doctor's hand warmly. But even then he could not resist a certain theatrical pathos. "You are my good angel," he said with much expression. "I owe you inexpressible thanks! I will slip into my coat and follow you at once to the ambassador's rooms."

VIII

The reconciliation with her lover seemed to have a more beneficial effect upon the singer than did her medicines. She recovered quickly in the next few days, and was soon well enough to leave her bed, and to receive her sympathizing friends in her boudoir.

The chief of police had been waiting for this improvement in her condition to take up the case officially. He was a cautious and capable man, and rumor said that it was not easy for the criminal to escape upon whom his eye had once fallen. Dr. Lange had told him the singer's history, and he had received still further information from Baron Martinow. The ambassador told him that he had caused the authorities to investigate the life and the business dealings of the Chevalier de Planto. He had not neglected to emphasize the fact that the poor child had been actually sold. Shortly after Giuseppa had left Paris the house from which she had fled had been closed by the police, and the baron attributed this action to the information he had given. He also had heard of the chevalier's death, but believed, as did the police chief, that it was only a blind by means of which he might the more easily continue his nefarious business. For both men had no doubt that it was this man who had attempted to murder the singer. But it would be very difficult to follow the trace of this murderer. All the strangers who had been in B. at the time were quite above suspicion. However, they had the handkerchief which had been found in Signora Bianetti's room, and the descrip-

tion of it had been given to all seamstresses and all laundresses who had the care of the garments of strangers in the city. And the chief of police believed that it was very likely the murderer would make a second attempt upon the life of his victim, and that he was probably hiding somewhere in the vicinity.

As soon as the patient had begun to recover, the chief of police visited her in company with Dr. Lange. The three discussed the steps to be taken, but none seemed to them quite hopeful of results. Giuseppa herself finally made a suggestion which pleased both men very much. "My dear doctor," she said, "has permitted me to go out next week. If he does not think it will harm me, I might attend the last ball of the carnival as my first appearance in public again. It would interest me to show myself for the first time in the place where my misfortunes began. We will take care that it is known throughout the city that I am to attend the ball. If the chevalier is still here, I am firmly convinced that he will attempt to approach me in some disguise. He will be careful not to speak to me, or to betray himself in any way. But I know that he will not give over his attempt upon my life, and I would know him among a thousand. His height, his figure, and, above all, his eyes, would make him known to me. What do you think of this, gentlemen?"

"The plan is not a bad one," said the chief of police. "I am willing to wager that when he hears you are to be at the ball, he will appear there himself, if only to see you again and to give his anger fresh nourishment. I would recommend that you do not wear a mask. That will enable him to recognize you the more quickly, and the sooner to fall into our trap. I will dress a couple of my strongest men in dominos, and they shall remain near you the entire evening. At a sign from you they will arrest the old fox."

Babette, the signora's maid, had been in the room during this conversation. When she heard that her lady was making plans to discover the murderer or his accomplices, she believed it to be her duty to help as much as she could.

She waited for the chief of police as he was leaving the house, and told him that she had confided a circumstance to Dr. Lange, to which he did not seem to attach much importance, although it seemed worthy of notice to her.

"Nothing is unimportant for the police," answered the director. "If you know anything, tell me what it is."

"I believe my signora is too discreet, and would not tell it herself. But when she had been stabbed and fainted in my arms, her last sigh was—Bolnau."

"What?" exclaimed the chief of police angrily. "And they have not told me of this yet? This is very important. Are you sure you heard aright?—Bolnau?"

"On my honor!" replied the girl, laying her hands on her heart. "Bolnau was the name she said, and with such an expression of grief that I believe it must be the name of the murderer. But please, sir, do not betray me!"

The chief of police believed on principle that no man, however respectable he might be, was too good to commit a crime. Councilor Bolnau (he knew of no one else of this name in the city) was known to him as a man of absolute probity and of well-regulated life. But were there not instances of people of just this character discovered later to be secret criminals? Might not this man be in league with the notorious Chevalier de Planto? In such musings he continued on his way, and as he neared Broad Street it suddenly occurred to him that this was the hour when the councilor was wont to take his morning promenade. The chief decided it was a very good chance to look into the matter a little. As he turned the corner he saw the councilor coming down the street, bowing to the right and to the left, stopping to chat and laugh every few steps, a picture of cheerfulness and good nature. He might have been about fifty steps from the head of police when he caught sight of him, grew pale, and turned as if about to go down a side street. "Suspicious, most suspicious!" thought the chief, calling out the other's name as if he had just seen him. The councilor was the picture of misery. He tried to smile and to utter a jovial "*Bonjour*," but his

eyes rolled uneasily, his knees trembled and his teeth chattered.

"Well, well, what a stranger you are! I haven't seen you pass my window for several days. Aren't you well? You are so pale." The chief spoke cheerfully, but he glanced sharply at the other's face.

"Oh, no, it was just a little chill—I haven't been quite well for several days, but I think that I am all right now."

"Indeed! You have not been well?" continued the head of police. "I should not have thought it! I seem to remember to have seen you at the last ball in excellent spirits."

"Yes, indeed! But the very following day I had to go to bed with one of my attacks. But I am quite well again now."

"Well, in that case you will be certain to attend the coming ball. It is to be the last of the season, and they say it will be unusually brilliant. I hope to meet you there, councilor; and until then, adieu!"

IX

"I WILL not fail to be there!" called out the councilor with a very depressed expression. "He suspects me!" he thought to himself. "He has heard of that last word before she fainted. They say she is almost well again; but what does that matter to the police authorities when they once suspect you? Could he have been spying upon me? Perhaps they are following me and reporting to him everything that I say or do? Merciful Heaven! to think that *I* should ever have come to be a dangerous individual!"

Thus reasoned the unfortunate Bolnau, his fear increasing as he thought over the suspicious question about the next ball. "He thinks probably that I would not dare to approach the young lady because of a guilty conscience. But I will go! I will not let him nourish this suspicion. But suppose I really should tremble and become excited

when I see her? He would then believe that it was the pangs of remorse!" He tortured himself with these questionings for days, trying in vain to nerve himself to face the danger. He ordered a handsome Oriental costume, the dress of the Pasha of Janina. He put it on every day, and standing in front of a large mirror, he endeavored to school his features until he should look as if he were quite at home in this new garb. He made a lay figure out of his dressing-gown and sat it on the sofa; this was to represent Signora Bianetti. He bowed politely before her and said, "I am most delighted to see that you are quite well again." On the third day he had progressed sufficiently to say his lesson without trembling. Then he attempted something still more difficult. He offered the lady a plate with bonbons and punch, taking a glass of water to practice on. At first the dishes rattled in his trembling hand, but he soon learned to hold them more steadily, and to remark quite cheerily, "My dear signora, may I not offer you some slight refreshment?" He was getting along finely. No mortal man should see him tremble! He was going to the ball, be he ever so fearful!

Dr. Lange would not yield to anyone else the pleasure of escorting his recovered patient upon her first appearance in public. He accompanied her to the ball, and seemed to feel quite proud of his position as official escort of the beautiful girl who was now an object of great interest to all the townspeople. The inhabitants of B. are a strange sort; but perhaps they are not so very different from people elsewhere, after all! In the first days of the exciting affair one could hear nothing but evil said of the singer, from the most aristocratic drawing-rooms down to the meanest beer-gardens. But when men of position had taken up the cudgels in her behalf, when leaders of society began to praise her, the tide turned in her favor, and the entire city seemed to look upon it as a cause for public rejoicing that she had recovered again. When she entered the ballroom, the entire company appeared to have been waiting to make her the queen of the occasion. They cheered and clapped

at her entrance, crowded about her, and had so much that was complimentary to say to her that there was sufficient for some portion to fall on the head of Dr. Lange, who was much praised for having so cleverly brought her out of danger.

The singer was very happy over all this attention and applause. The joy of it almost made her forget the serious reason for her appearance that evening. But the four sturdily built dominos who were constantly near her, and the doctor's questions as to whether she had not already caught sight of the chevalier's gray eyes, reminded her of the business of the evening. She herself, and Dr. Lange also, had noticed that a tall, gaunt Turk (in B. they called it the costume of Ali Baba) was apparently endeavoring to approach her and to remain at her side. Whenever the movement of the crowd separated them, he would edge his way up to her again. The singer nudged the doctor and glanced toward the pasha. The doctor followed her glance, and said, "I've been noticing him for some time," as the Turk approached with hesitating steps. The singer held her escort's arm closer. Now he was quite near. Little gray eyes peeped out from his mask, and a hollow voice said: "Honored signora, I am most delighted to see you once more in full possession of your health." The singer started, trembled, and drew back. This seemed to alarm the man, and he disappeared again in the crowd. "Was that he?" asked the doctor. "Try to be strong; you know how important it is that we should be able to discover him. Do you think this is he?"

"I am not quite certain yet," she answered. "But I seem to recognize his eyes."

Dr. Lange gave the four dominos the order to watch the pasha sharply. He himself walked on through the hall with his lady. But they had not gone very far before they noticed the Turk evidently following them at a little distance.

Dr. Lange and his companion stepped to the buffet to take some refreshments. Scarce had they halted when the

Turk was at their side. He was holding a plate with a glass of punch and some bonbons on it; his eyes glistened; the glass danced about on the shaking plate. Now he is at her side and holds the plate out to her with the words, "My dear signora, may I not offer you some slight refreshment?"

The singer looked at him in alarm, pushed back the plate, and cried: "It is he, it is he! That terrible man! He is trying to poison me!"

The Pasha of Janina stood perfectly motionless—he seemed to have given up all idea of resistance. Without a word he allowed himself to be led away by the four sturdy dominos.

At the same moment the doctor felt somebody pulling at his cloak from behind. He turned and saw the little humpbacked lackey from the Hotel de Portugal standing pale and trembling before him. "For the love of God, doctor, won't you please come with me to No. 53? The devil is just about to fetch the French gentleman."

"What nonsense is this?" asked the doctor angrily, for he was just about to follow the arrested man to the police station. "What does it matter to me if the devil fetches him?"

"But please, honored doctor," cried the little man, almost weeping, "I thought you might possibly save him. Your honor is court physician, and usually goes to the sick people in the hotels."

Dr. Lange swallowed a curse, for he saw that he would not be able to avoid this call. He motioned to Boloni, who was standing near them, put the singer in his charge, and hurried off to the hotel with the little lackey.

X

It was quiet and deserted in the great hotel. Midnight had passed, and the lamps in the halls and on the stairways burned dimly. Dr. Lange had an uncanny sensation as

he followed the little man upstairs to the solitary invalid. The lackey opened the door, the doctor entered, and almost sank to his knees in his horror. Here lay, or rather sat, in the bed the very same sort of being who had for several days been occupying his waking and sleeping thoughts. It was a tall, gaunt, elderly man with a pointed white night-cap drawn over his forehead. Under the nightcap a large, sharp nose rose out of a thin yellow-brown face. From his color one might have thought the man already dead, had not a pair of piercing gray eyes given him a look of terrifying life. His long, thin fingers were scratching at the bed covering, while he laughed incessantly, a hoarse, frightful laugh.

"Look, he is digging his own grave!" whispered the little lackey, waking the doctor out of his dazed staring at the sick man. It was just thus that he had imagined the Chevalier de Planto would look: this piercing gray eye, these repulsive features, this thin, bony figure—all just as the singer had described him. But then he controlled himself—had he not just seen the chevalier arrested? Might not another man have gray eyes? And should he be surprised if a sick man was thin and pale? The doctor laughed at himself and stepped to the bedside. But in all his long years of practice he had never felt such fear, such repulsion at any sick bed as he did here, when he took the cold, clammy hand in his.

"This stupid fellow," cried the sick man with a weak, hoarse voice, mingling French, bad Italian, and broken German together in his speech—"this stupid fellow has brought me a doctor, I do believe. You will pardon him, sir. I have never thought much of your art. The only thing that can help me are the baths of Genoa. I have told this little beast to order post-horses for me. I will set out to-night."

"He'll set out," murmured the little lackey; "he'll set out with six coal-black steeds, but it won't be to Genoa he goes. He's going to that place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth." The doctor saw that there was very

little to do here. He recognized the symptoms of approaching death in the sick man's eyes and in his uneasiness. He contented himself, therefore, with the command to the patient to lie as quiet as possible, and promised him a soothing draught.

The sick man laughed grimly. "Lie quiet?" he answered. "When I lie still, I can't breathe. I must sit up! I must sit in my carriage! I must get away from here! Dog, have you ordered my horses, and packed my luggage?"

"Oh, dear Lord above!" groaned the little man. "Here he is thinking about his luggage. It'll be a heavy sackful of sins that he takes with him. It wouldn't be possible to tell you all the godless speeches and curses I have heard him utter."

The physician took the sick man's hand again. "Will you not trust me a little?" he said. "My art may be able to help you, after all. Your servant tells me that you have an old wound which has opened again. Will you not let me examine it?"

The sick man complied with grumblings. The physician took off a badly made bandage, and found—a stab wound near the heart! Remarkable to relate, the wound was of the same size and character, and almost exactly in the same place as the singer's wound had been.

"But this is a fresh wound, a stab!" cried the doctor, looking at the patient with distrust. "Where did you get this wound?"

"You think I stabbed myself? Or that I have been dueling? No, by all the devils! I had a dagger in my breast pocket, and I scratched myself a little in falling downstairs."

"Scratched himself a little?" thought Lange. "He will die of this wound."

He had prepared some lemonade, and held it out to the sick man. The latter seemed to feel refreshed after drinking. He lay still for a few moments; then, seeing that several drops had fallen on the coverlet, he began to curse

and demanded a handkerchief. The lackey ran to a chest, opened it and brought out a handkerchief. A sudden terrible suspicion arose in Dr. Lange's mind. The handkerchief was of the same material and color as the one which had been found in the singer's room. The little servant was about to hand the cloth to the sick man when the latter pushed it away, and cried: "To the devil with you, little beast! How often must I tell you to put eau de heliotrope on it?" The servant took out a little bottle and sprinkled some drops upon the cloth. It was the same perfume that the other handkerchief had exhaled.

Dr. Lange trembled in every limb. There was no longer any doubt this man here was the would-be murderer of the singer Bianetti—the Chevalier de Planto! It was a helpless and dying man that he saw before him, but the doctor felt as if he might at any moment spring from his bed and clutch at his throat. He could not endure to remain an instant longer in the room with this terrible man. As he took up his hat, the little lackey clutched at his coat and groaned: "Oh, your honor, don't leave me alone with him! I should die of fright if *he* were to die now and walk about like a ghost in his flannel clothes and his nightcap. For the love of God, don't leave me."

The sick man grinned alarmingly, and laughed and cursed all together. The fright of the little servant seemed to amuse him. He put one long, thin leg out of the bed and waved his claw-like hands in the air. The doctor could endure it no longer. The madness of the other seemed to pass over into his own soul. He pushed back the little lackey and rushed from the room. Even at the street door below he could still hear the murderer's horrible laugh.

. . . . .

The following morning a carriage stopped before the Hotel de Portugal. A veiled lady and two elderly gentlemen dismounted from it and entered the house. "It is a strange chance that he should have wounded himself so severely in falling downstairs that he could not flee from the city. And a still stranger chance that it was just you,

Lange, that was called to him," remarked one of the gentlemen.

"It was, indeed," said the veiled lady. "But did you not think it was also a strange chance about the handkerchiefs? One of them he left in my room, and then to think that he should have asked for another in the very moment that the doctor was with him."

"That is fate!" said the other gentleman. "It is as if it were ordained that it should happen so. But I had almost forgotten something in all this excitement. How about the pasha who was arrested? Signora must have been mistaken. Did you release him again? Who was the poor devil?"

"Quite the contrary!" said the first gentleman. "I am convinced that this man is an accomplice of the murderer. I have had my eye on him for some time. I have ordered him to be brought here. I want to confront him with the villain upstairs."

"An accomplice? Impossible!" cried the lady.

"Not at all," said the gentleman with a slight smile. "We know a good deal more than we are willing to say just yet. But here we are at No. 53. Mademoiselle, will you have the kindness to step in here to No. 54 for the time being? Signor Boloni has permitted us to use his room as long as we need it. When I am ready to question you I will send for you."

We need not tell the reader that these three persons were the singer, the doctor, and the head of police. They came to accuse the Chevalier de Planto of an attempt at murder. The chief and the physician entered No. 53. The sick man sat up in bed just as the doctor had seen him the night before. In the light of day his features seemed still more haggard, the expression of his eye still more terrible. He looked at the doctor, then at his companion, with a glance which seemed already that of a dying man. He seemed trying to find out what all this could mean, for he already had one other visitor in his room, a young attorney with red cheeks and bright eyes. The latter had taken a place

at a table, arranged a pile of white paper before him, and held a long pen ready in his hand.

"Beast, what do these gentlemen wish here?" cried the sick man in a weak voice to his little servant. "You know I do not receive visitors."

The chief of police stepped to the bed, looked firmly at the sick man, and said with emphasis, "Chevalier de Planto!"

"*Qui vive?*" cried the sick man, raising his head in military salute.

"You are the Chevalier de Planto?"

The gray eyes gleamed, he threw piercing glances about the room, laughed mockingly, and shook his head as he replied, "The chevalier is long since dead."

"And who are you? I command you to answer, in the name of the king."

The dying man laughed: "My name is Lorier. Beast, show the gentleman my passport."

"It will not be necessary. Do you recognize this handkerchief?"

"Why should I not recognize it? You have just taken it from the chair there. But why do you annoy me with these questions?"

"If you will look down at your left hand," said the chief, "you will see that you are holding your own handkerchief. This one was found in the house of a certain Giuseppa Bianetti."

The sick man threw an angry look at his visitors. He clenched his fists and gnashed his teeth, but he would not speak another word. The chief of police motioned to the doctor. The latter left the room and returned in an instant with the singer, Signor Boloni, and the Ambassador Baron Martinow.

"Baron Martinow!" the chief turned to the ambassador, "do you recognize this man for the person you knew in Paris under the name of the Chevalier de Planto?"

"I do," replied the baron. "And I am ready to repeat what I have already told the police about him."

"Giuseppa Bianetti, is this the man who took you from your stepfather's home, who brought you into his house in Paris, and whom you accuse of the attempt to murder you?"

The singer trembled as she looked on the terrible man, but before she could answer, he himself spared her all further confession. He raised himself still higher in his bed, the top of his woolen nightcap seemed to rise up of itself, his arms were so stiff that he could scarcely move them, but his fingers caught at the air like greedy claws. His voice was scarcely more than a hoarse whisper.

"Are you come to visit me, Seppa? That is nice of you. I know that you are delighted to see me looking like this. I am sorry, indeed, that I did not reach your heart, for I would gladly have spared you the pain of seeing your uncle mocked thus by these beasts!"

"What more witness do we need?" interrupted the chief. "Attorney, you will please write out a warrant of arrest for——"

"What would you do?" cried the doctor. "Don't you see his death is very near? He will not live half an hour longer. If you have any more questions to ask him, do it at once."

The chief ordered a servant to tell the gendarmes waiting downstairs that they were to bring up their captive. The sick man sank down more and more in his pillows. His eye was breaking, but rage and anger still held it fixed on the trembling girl.

"Seppa," he whispered again. "You have ruined me; it was for that that you deserved death. You have ruined your father; they sent him to prison because he had sold you for money. He employed me to kill you—I regret indeed that my hands trembled. Cursed be these hands that can no longer strike true!" The terrible curses which he continued to pour out over himself and Giuseppa were interrupted by new arrivals. Two gendarmes brought in a man in Turkish garb—the unfortunate Pasha of Janina. Under the turban was the utterly miserable face of Councilor

Bolnau! The entire company was struck dumb with astonishment at this apparition. The musician Boloni seemed particularly startled; he grew first red, then pale, and turned his head away.

"Chevalier de Planto," said the chief, "do you know this man?"

The sick man had closed his eyes. He opened them with difficulty and said, "Send him to the devil! I never saw him before."

The Turk looked at those about him with an expression of utter despair. "I knew that it would happen thus," he said with tears in his voice. "I have been afraid of this. Mademoiselle Bianetti, how could you bring an innocent man into all this misery?"

"But what is the matter with the gentleman?" asked the singer. "I do not know him at all. What has he done, sir?"

The chief answered in great solemnity: "Signora, the Court of Justice knows no partiality! You must know this gentleman; it is Councilor Bolnau. Your own servant has confessed that when you were stabbed, you called upon his name."

The pasha groaned: "Yes, indeed, my honest name at such a moment!"

The singer was much astonished. A deep flush colored her beautiful face, she caught the hand of her lover and exclaimed: "Carlo, we must speak now! Yes, sir, I did mention this name, so dear to me, but it was not that gentleman I meant—it was——"

"It was I!" exclaimed the musician, stepping forward. "My name, if my dear father there will allow me, is Carl Bolnau."

"Carl! Musician! American!" cried the Turk, seizing him in his arms. "That is the first sensible word you ever said. You have saved me in my hour of need."

"If this is the case," said the chief of police, "then you are free, and our business here is only with this Chevalier de Planto." He turned to the bed, but the physician was al-

ready standing there, holding the hand of the murderer in his own. He now laid it gravely back on to the coverlet and closed the staring eyes. "He has gone before a higher judge," he said solemnly.

They walked softly from the room, and entered the musician's apartment. The singer buried her face on her lover's breast, and her tears, the last she should ever weep over her unfortunate fate, flowed freely. The pasha walked about the group, as if struggling for some important decision. He whispered to the doctor, then approached the young couple.

"My dearest mademoiselle," he said, "I have had much to suffer on your account. As you have uttered my name at such an important moment, I must beg you to take it for your own. You scorned the refreshment I offered you yesterday. But to-day I hope you will not refuse me—when I present to you this musical son of mine, and ask you to marry him."

She did not refuse this time, but caught his hand and kissed it fervently. The young musician clasped her in his arms again, and seemed to have quite forgotten his usual tragical pathos. The councilor took the doctor's hand and said: "Would we have thought, Lange, that all this would happen the day you told me to count the windows in the Palace—when you said to me, 'Her last word was Bolnau'?"

"Well, and what more do you want?" replied the physician, laughing. "It was all for the best that I told you this circumstance then. For who knows whether it would have all come about like this without the singer's last word?"

Ernest Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann

The Deserted House

THEY were all agreed in the belief that the actual facts of life are often far more wonderful than the invention of even the liveliest imagination can be.

"It seems to me," spoke Lelio, "that history gives proof sufficient of this. And that is why the so-called historical romances seem so repulsive and tasteless to us, those stories wherein the author mingles the foolish fancies of his meager brain with the deeds of the great powers of the universe."

Franz took the word. "It is the deep reality of the inscrutable secrets surrounding us that oppresses us with a might wherein we recognize the Spirit that rules, the Spirit out of which our being springs." "Alas," said Lelio, "it is the most terrible result of the fall of man, that we have lost the power of recognizing the eternal verities."

"Many are called, but few are chosen," broke in Franz. "Do you not believe that an understanding of the wonders of our existence is given to some of us in the form of another sense? But if you would allow me to drag the conversation up from these dark regions where we are in danger of losing our path altogether up into the brightness of light-hearted merriment, I would like to make the scurrilous suggestion that those mortals to whom this gift of seeing the Unseen has been given remind me of bats. You know the learned anatomist Spallanzani has discovered a sixth sense in these little animals which can do not only the entire work of the other senses, but work of its own besides."

"Oho," laughed Edward, "according to that, the bats would be the only natural-born clairvoyants. But I know some one who possesses that gift of insight, of which you

were speaking, in a remarkable degree. Because of it he will often follow for days some unknown person who has happened to attract his attention by an oddity in manner, appearance, or garb; he will ponder to melancholy over some trifling incident, some lightly told story; he will combine the antipodes and raise up relationships in his imagination which are unknown to everyone else."

"Wait a bit," cried Lelio. "It is our Theodore of whom you are speaking now. And it looks to me as if he were having some weird vision at this very moment. See how strangely he gazes out into the distance."

Theodore had been sitting in silence up to this moment. Now he spoke: "If my glances are strange it is because they reflect the strange things that were called up before my mental vision by your conversation, the memories of a most remarkable adventure——"

"Oh, tell it to us," interrupted his friends.

"Gladly," continued Theodore. "But first, let me set right a slight confusion in your ideas on the subject of the mysterious. You appear to confound what is merely odd and unusual with what is really mysterious or marvelous, that which surpasses comprehension or belief. The odd and the unusual, it is true, spring often from the truly marvelous, and the twigs and flowers hide the parent stem from our eyes. Both the odd and the unusual and the truly marvelous are mingled in the adventure which I am about to narrate to you, mingled in a manner which is striking and even awesome." With these words Theodore drew from his pocket a notebook in which, as his friends knew, he had written down the impressions of his late journeyings. Refreshing his memory by a look at its pages now and then, he narrated the following story.

You know already that I spent the greater part of last summer in X——. The many old friends and acquaintances I found there, the free, jovial life, the manifold artistic and intellectual interests—all these combined to keep me in that city. I was happy as never before, and found

rich nourishment for my old fondness for wandering alone through the streets, stopping to enjoy every picture in the shop windows, every placard on the walls, or watching the passers-by and choosing some one or the other of them to cast his horoscope secretly to myself.

There is one broad avenue leading to the —— Gate and lined with handsome buildings of all descriptions, which is the meeting place of the rich and fashionable world. The shops which occupy the ground floor of the tall palaces are devoted to the trade in articles of luxury, and the apartments above are the dwellings of people of wealth and position. The aristocratic hotels are to be found in this avenue, the palaces of the foreign ambassadors are there, and you can easily imagine that such a street would be the center of the city's life and gayety.

I had wandered through the avenue several times, when one day my attention was caught by a house which contrasted strangely with the others surrounding it. Picture to yourselves a low building but four windows broad, crowded in between two tall, handsome structures. Its one upper story was little higher than the tops of the ground-floor windows of its neighbors, its roof was dilapidated, its windows patched with paper, its discolored walls spoke of years of neglect. You can imagine how strange such a house must have looked in this street of wealth and fashion. Looking at it more attentively I perceived that the windows of the upper story were tightly closed and curtained, and that a wall had been built to hide the windows of the ground floor. The entrance gate, a little to one side, served also as a doorway for the building, but I could find no sign of latch, lock, or even a bell on this gate. I was convinced that the house must be unoccupied, for at whatever hour of the day I happened to be passing I had never seen the faintest signs of life about it. An unoccupied house in this avenue was indeed an odd sight. But I explained the phenomenon to myself by saying that the owner was doubtless absent upon a long journey, or living upon his country estates, and that he perhaps did not wish to sell or rent the

property, preferring to keep it for his own use in the eventuality of a visit to the city.

You all, the good comrades of my youth, know that I have been prone to consider myself a sort of clairvoyant, claiming to have glimpses of a strange world of wonders, a world which you, with your hard common sense, would attempt to deny or laugh away. I confess that I have often lost myself in mysteries which after all turned out to be no mysteries at all. And it looked at first as if this was to happen to me in the matter of the deserted house, that strange house which drew my steps and my thoughts to itself with a power that surprised me. But the point of my story will prove to you that I am right in asserting that I know more than you do. Listen now to what I am about to tell you.

One day, at the hour in which the fashionable world is accustomed to promenade up and down the avenue, I stood as usual before the deserted house, lost in thought. Suddenly I felt, without looking up, that some one had stopped beside me, fixing his eyes on me. It was Count P., whom I had found much in sympathy with many of my imaginings, and I knew that he also must have been deeply interested in the mystery of this house. It surprised me not a little, therefore, that he should smile ironically when I spoke of the strange impression that this deserted dwelling, here in the gay heart of the town, had made upon me. But I soon discovered the reason for his irony. Count P. had gone much farther than myself in his imaginings concerning the house. He had constructed for himself a complete history of the old building, a story weird enough to have been born in the fancy of a true poet. It would give me great pleasure to relate this story to you, but the events which happened to me in this connection are so interesting that I feel I must proceed with the narration of them at once.

When the count had completed his story to his own satisfaction, imagine his feelings on learning one day that the old house contained nothing more mysterious than a cake

bakery belonging to the pastry cook whose handsome shop adjoined the old structure. The windows of the ground floor were walled up to give protection to the ovens, and the heavy curtains of the upper story were to keep the sunlight from the wares laid out there. When the count informed me of this I felt as if a bucket of cold water had been suddenly thrown over me. The demon who is the enemy of all poets caught the dreamer by the nose and tweaked him painfully.

And yet, in spite of this prosaic explanation, I could not resist stopping before the deserted house whenever I passed it, and gentle tremors rippled through my veins as vague visions arose of what might be hidden there. I could not believe in this story of the cake and candy factory. Through some strange freak of the imagination I felt as a child feels when some fairy tale has been told it to conceal the truth it suspects. I scolded myself for a silly fool; the house remained unaltered in its appearance, and the visions faded in my brain, until one day a chance incident woke them to life again.

I was wandering through the avenue as usual, and as I passed the deserted house I could not resist a hasty glance at its close-curtained upper windows. But as I looked at it, the curtain on the last window near the pastry shop began to move. A hand, an arm, came out from between its folds. I took my opera glass from my pocket and saw a beautifully formed woman's hand, on the little finger of which a large diamond sparkled in unusual brilliancy; a rich bracelet glittered on the white, rounded arm. The hand set a tall, oddly formed crystal bottle on the window ledge and disappeared again behind the curtain.

I stopped as if frozen to stone; a weirdly pleasurable sensation, mingled with awe, streamed through my being with the warmth of an electric current. I stared up at the mysterious window and a sigh of longing arose from the very depths of my heart. When I came to myself again, I was angered to find that I was surrounded by a crowd which stood gazing up at the window with curious faces. I stole

away inconspicuously, and the demon of all things prosaic whispered to me that what I had just seen was the rich pastry cook's wife, in her Sunday adornment, placing an empty bottle, used for rose-water or the like, on the window sill. Nothing very weird about this.

Suddenly a most sensible thought came to me. I turned and entered the shining, mirror-walled shop of the pastry cook. Blowing the steaming foam from my cup of chocolate, I remarked: "You have a very useful addition to your establishment next door." The man leaned over his counter and looked at me with a questioning smile, as if he did not understand me. I repeated that in my opinion he had been very clever to set up his bakery in the neighboring house, although the deserted appearance of the building was a strange sight in its contrasting surroundings. "Why, sir," began the pastry cook, "who told you that the house next door belongs to us? Unfortunately every attempt on our part to acquire it has been in vain, and I fancy it is all the better so, for there is something queer about the place."

You can imagine, dear friends, how interested I became upon hearing these words, and that I begged the man to tell me more about the house.

"I do not know anything very definite, sir," he said. "All that we know for a certainty is that the house belongs to the Countess S., who lives on her estates and has not been to the city for years. This house, so they tell me, stood in its present shape before any of the handsome buildings were raised which are now the pride of our avenue, and in all these years there has been nothing done to it except to keep it from actual decay. Two living creatures alone dwell there, an aged misanthrope of a steward and his melancholy dog, which occasionally howls at the moon from the back courtyard. According to the general story the deserted house is haunted. In very truth my brother, who is the owner of this shop, and myself have often, when our business kept us awake during the silence of the night, heard strange sounds from the other side of the wall.

There was a rumbling and a scraping that frightened us both. And not very long ago we heard one night a strange singing which I could not describe to you. It was evidently the voice of an old woman, but the tones were so sharp and clear, and ran up to the top of the scale in cadences and long trills, the like of which I have never heard before, although I have heard many singers in many lands. It seemed to be a French song, but I am not quite sure of that, for I could not listen long to the mad, ghostly singing, it made the hair stand erect on my head. And at times, after the street noises are quiet, we can hear deep sighs, and sometimes a mad laugh, which seem to come out of the earth. But if you lay your ear to the wall in our back room, you can hear that the noises come from the house next door." He led me into the back room and pointed through the window. "And do you see that iron chimney coming out of the wall there? It smokes so heavily sometimes, even in summer when there are no fires used, that my brother has often quarreled with the old steward about it, fearing danger. But the old man excuses himself by saying that he was cooking his food. Heaven knows what the queer creature may eat, for often, when the pipe is smoking heavily, a strange and queer smell can be smelled all over the house."

The glass doors of the shop creaked in opening. The pastry cook hurried into the front room, and when he had nodded to the figure now entering he threw a meaning glance at me. I understood him perfectly. Who else could this strange guest be, but the steward who had charge of the mysterious house! Imagine a thin little man with a face the color of a mummy, with a sharp nose, tight-set lips, green cat's eyes, and a crazy smile; his hair dressed in the old-fashioned style with a high toupet and a bag at the back, and heavily powdered. He wore a faded old brown coat which was carefully brushed, gray stockings, and broad, flat-toed shoes with buckles. And imagine further, that in spite of his meagerness this little person is robustly built, with huge fists and long, strong fingers, and

that he walks to the shop counter with a strong, firm step, smiling his imbecile smile, and whining out: "A couple of candied oranges—a couple of macaroons—a couple of sugared chestnuts—" Picture all this to yourself and judge whether I had not sufficient cause to imagine a mystery here.

The pastry cook gathered up the wares the old man had demanded. "Weigh it out, weigh it out, honored neighbor," moaned the strange man, as he drew out a little leathern bag and sought in it for his money. I noticed that he paid for his purchase in worn old coins, some of which were no longer in use. He seemed very unhappy and murmured: "Sweet—sweet—it must all be sweet! Well, let it be! The devil has pure honey for his bride—pure honey!"

The pastry cook smiled at me and then spoke to the old man. "You do not seem to be quite well. Yes, yes, old age, old age! It takes the strength from our limbs." The old man's expression did not change, but his voice went up: "Old age?—Old age?—Lose strength?—Grow weak?—Oho!" And with this he clapped his hands together until the joints cracked, and sprang high up into the air until the entire shop trembled and the glass vessels on the walls and counters rattled and shook. But in the same moment a hideous screaming was heard; the old man had stepped on his black dog, which, creeping in behind him, had laid itself at his feet on the floor. "Devilish beast—dog of hell!" groaned the old man in his former miserable tone, opening his bag and giving the dog a large macaroon. The dog, which had burst out into a cry of distress that was truly human, was quiet at once, sat down on its haunches, and gnawed at the macaroon like a squirrel. When it had finished its tidbit, the old man had also finished the packing up and putting away of his purchases. "Good night, honored neighbor," he spoke, taking the hand of the pastry cook and pressing it until the latter cried aloud in pain. "The weak old man wishes you a good night, most honorable Sir Neighbor," he repeated, and then walked from the shop, followed closely by his black dog. The old

man did not seem to have noticed me at all. I was quite dumfoundered in my astonishment.

"There, you see," began the pastry cook. "This is the way he acts when he comes in here, two or three times a month, it is. But I can get nothing out of him except the fact that he was a former valet of Count S., that he is now in charge of this house here, and that every day—for many years now—he expects the arrival of his master's family. My brother spoke to him one day about the strange noises at night; but he answered calmly, 'Yes, people say the ghosts walk about in the house. But do not believe it, for it is not true." The hour was now come when fashion demanded that the elegant world of the city should assemble in this attractive shop. The doors opened incessantly, the place was thronged, and I could ask no further questions.

This much I knew, that Count P.'s information about the ownership and the use of the house were not correct; also, that the old steward, in spite of his denial, was not living alone there, and that some mystery was hidden behind its discolored walls. How could I combine the story of the strange and grewsome singing with the appearance of the beautiful arm at the window? That arm could not be part of the wrinkled body of an old woman; the singing, according to the pastry cook's story, could not come from the throat of a blooming and youthful maiden. I decided in favor of the arm, as it was easy to explain to myself that some trick of acoustics had made the voice sound sharp and old, or that it had appeared so only in the pastry cook's fear-distorted imagination. Then I thought of the smoke, the strange odors, the oddly formed crystal bottle that I had seen, and soon the vision of a beautiful creature held enthralled by fatal magic stood as if alive before my mental vision. The old man became a wizard who, perhaps quite independently of the family he served, had set up his devil's kitchen in the deserted house. My imagination had begun to work, and in my dreams that night I saw clearly the hand with the sparkling diamond on its

finger, the arm with the shining bracelet. From out thin, gray mists there appeared a sweet face with sadly imploring blue eyes, then the entire exquisite figure of a beautiful girl. And I saw that what I had thought was mist was the fine steam flowing out in circles from a crystal bottle held in the hands of the vision.

"Oh, fairest creature of my dreams," I cried in rapture. "Reveal to me where thou art, what it is that enthralls thee. Ah, I know it! It is black magic that holds thee captive—thou art the unhappy slave of that malicious devil who wanders about brown-clad and bewigged in pastry shops, scattering their wares with his unholy springing, and feeding his demon dog on macaroons, after they have howled out a Satanic measure in five-eight time. Oh, I know it all, thou fair and charming vision. The diamond is the reflection of the fire of thy heart. But that bracelet about thine arm is a link of the chain which the brown-clad one says is a magnetic chain. Do not believe it, O glorious one! See how it shines in the blue fire from the retort. One moment more and thou art free. And now, O maiden, open thy rosebud mouth and tell me—" In this moment a gnarled fist leaped over my shoulder and clutched at the crystal bottle, which sprang into a thousand pieces in the air. With a faint, sad moan, the charming vision faded into the blackness of the night.

When morning came to put an end to my dreaming I hurried to the avenue and placed myself before the deserted house. Heavy blinds were drawn before the upper windows. The street was still quite empty, and I stepped close to the windows of the ground floor and listened and listened; but I heard no sound. The house was as quiet as the grave. The business of the day began, the passers-by became more numerous, and I was obliged to go on. I will not weary you with the recital of how for many days I crept about the house at that hour, but without discovering anything of interest. None of my questionings could reveal anything to me, and the beautiful picture of my vision began finally to pale and fade away.

At last as I passed, late one evening, I saw that the door of the deserted house was half open and the brown-clad old man was peeping out. I stepped quickly to his side with a sudden idea. "Does not Councilor Binder live in this house?" Thus I asked the old man, pushing him before me as I entered the dimly lighted vestibule. The guardian of the old house looked at me with his piercing eyes, and answered in gentle, slow tones: "No, he does not live here, he never has lived here, he never will live here, he does not live anywhere on this avenue. But people say the ghosts walk about in this house. Yet I can assure you that it is not true. It is a quiet, a pretty house, and tomorrow the gracious Countess S. will move into it. Good night, dear gentleman." With these words the old man maneuvered me out of the house and locked the gate behind me. I heard his feet drag across the floor, I heard his coughing and the rattling of his bunch of keys, and I heard him descend some steps. Then all was silent. During the short time that I had been in the house I had noticed that the corridor was hung with old tapestries and furnished like a drawing-room with large, heavy chairs in red damask.

And now, as if called into life by my entrance into the mysterious house, my adventures began. The following day, as I walked through the avenue in the noon hour, and my eyes sought the deserted house as usual, I saw something glistening in the last window of the upper story. Coming nearer I noticed that the outer blind had been quite drawn up and the inner curtain slightly opened. The sparkle of a diamond met my eye. O kind Heaven! The face of my dream looked at me, gently imploring, from above the rounded arm on which her head was resting. But how was it possible to stand still in the moving crowd without attracting attention? Suddenly I caught sight of the benches placed in the gravel walk in the center of the avenue, and I saw that one of them was directly opposite the house. I sprang over to it, and leaning over its back, I could stare up at the mysterious window un-

disturbed. Yes, it was she, the charming maiden of my dream! But her eye did not seem to seek me as I had at first thought; her glance was cold and unfocused, and had it not been for an occasional motion of the hand and arm, I might have thought that I was looking at a cleverly painted picture.

I was so lost in my adoration of the mysterious being in the window, so aroused and excited throughout all my nerve centers, that I did not hear the shrill voice of an Italian street hawker, who had been offering me his wares for some time. Finally he touched me on the arm; I turned hastily and commanded him to let me alone. But he did not cease his entreaties, asserting that he had earned nothing to-day, and begging me to buy some small trifle from him. Full of impatience to get rid of him I put my hand in my pocket. With the words: "I have more beautiful things here," he opened the under drawer of his box and held out to me a little, round pocket mirror. In it, as he held it up before my face, I could see the deserted house behind me, the window, and the sweet face of my vision there.

I bought the little mirror at once, for I saw that it would make it possible for me to sit comfortably and inconspicuously, and yet watch the window. The longer I looked at the reflection in the glass, the more I fell captive to a weird and quite indescribable sensation, which I might almost call a waking dream. It was as if a lethargy had lamed my eyes, holding them fastened on the glass beyond my power to loosen them. Through my mind there rushed the memory of an old nurse's tale of my earliest childhood. When my nurse was taking me off to bed, and I showed an inclination to stand peering into the great mirror in my father's room, she would tell me that when children looked into mirrors in the night time they would see a strange, hideous face there, and their eyes would be frozen so that they could not move them again. The thought struck awe to my soul, but I could not resist a peep at the mirror, I was so curious to see the strange face. Once I did be-

lieve that I saw two hideous glowing eyes shining out of the mirror. I screamed and fell down in a swoon.

All these foolish memories of my early childhood came trooping back to me. My blood ran cold through my veins. I would have thrown the mirror from me, but I could not. And now at last the beautiful eyes of the fair vision looked at *me*, her glance sought mine and shone deep down into my heart. The terror I had felt left me, giving way to the pleasurable pain of sweetest longing.

"You have a pretty little mirror there," said a voice beside me. I awoke from my dream, and was not a little confused when I saw smiling faces looking at me from either side. Several persons had sat down upon my bench, and it was quite certain that my staring into the window, and my probably strange expression, had afforded them great cause for amusement.

"You have a pretty little mirror there," repeated the man, as I did not answer him. His glance said more, and asked without words the reason of my staring so oddly into the little glass. He was an elderly man, neatly dressed, and his voice and eyes were so full of good nature that I could not refuse him my confidence. I told him that I had been looking in the mirror at the picture of a beautiful maiden who was sitting at a window of the deserted house. I went even farther; I asked the old man if he had not seen the fair face himself. "Over there? In the old house —in the last window?" He repeated my questions in a tone of surprise.

"Yes, yes," I exclaimed.

The old man smiled and answered: "Well, well, that was a strange delusion. My old eyes—thank Heaven for my old eyes! Yes, yes, sir. I saw a pretty face in the window there, with my own eyes; but it seemed to me to be an excellently well-painted oil portrait."

I turned quickly and looked toward the window; there was no one there, and the blind had been pulled down. "Yes," continued the old man, "yes, sir. Now it is too late to make sure of the matter, for just now the servant,

who, as I know, lives there alone in the house of the Countess S., took the picture away from the window after he had dusted it, and let down the blinds."

"Was it, then, surely a picture?" I asked again, in bewilderment.

"You can trust my eyes," replied the old man. "The optical delusion was strengthened by your seeing only the reflection in the mirror. And when I was in your years it was easy enough for my fancy to call up the picture of a beautiful maiden."

"But the hand and arm moved," I exclaimed. "Oh, yes, they moved, indeed they moved," said the old man smiling, as he patted me on the shoulder. Then he arose to go, and bowing politely, closed his remarks with the words, "Beware of mirrors which can lie so vividly. Your obedient servant, sir."

You can imagine how I felt when I saw that he looked upon me as a foolish fantast. I began to be convinced that the old man was right, and that it was only my absurd imagination which insisted on raising up mysteries about the deserted house.

I hurried home full of anger and disgust, and promised myself that I would not think of the mysterious house, and would not even walk through the avenue for several days. I kept my vow, spending my days working at my desk, and my evenings in the company of jovial friends, leaving myself no time to think of the mysteries which so enthralled me. And yet, it was just in these days that I would start up out of my sleep as if awakened by a touch, only to find that all that had aroused me was merely the *thought* of that mysterious being whom I had seen in my vision and in the window of the deserted house. Even during my work, or in the midst of a lively conversation with my friends, I felt the same thought shoot through me like an electric current. I condemned the little mirror in which I had seen the charming picture to a prosaic daily use. I placed it on my dressing-table that I might bind my cravat before it, and thus it happened one day, when I was

about to utilize it for this important business, that its glass seemed dull, and that I took it up and breathed on it to rub it bright again. My heart seemed to stand still, every fiber in me trembled in delightful awe. Yes, that is all the name I can find for the feeling that came over me, when, as my breath clouded the little mirror, I saw the beautiful face of my dreams arise and smile at me through blue mists. You laugh at me? You look upon me as an incorrigible dreamer? Think what you will about it—the fair face looked at me from out of the mirror! But as soon as the clouding vanished, the face vanished in the brightened glass.

I will not weary you with a detailed recital of my sensations the next few days. I will only say that I repeated again the experiments with the mirror, sometimes with success, sometimes without. When I had not been able to call up the vision, I would run to the deserted house and stare up at the windows; but I saw no human being anywhere about the building. I lived only in thoughts of my vision; everything else seemed indifferent to me. I neglected my friends and my studies. The tortures in my soul passed over into, or rather mingled with, physical sensations which frightened me, and which at last made me fear for my reason. One day, after an unusually severe attack, I put my little mirror in my pocket and hurried to the home of Dr. K., who was noted for his treatment of those diseases of the mind out of which physical diseases so often grow. I told him my story; I did not conceal the slightest incident from him, and I implored him to save me from the terrible fate which seemed to threaten me. He listened to me quietly, but I read astonishment in his glance. Then he said: "The danger is not as near as you believe, and I think that I may say that it can be easily prevented. You are undergoing an unusual psychical disturbance, beyond a doubt. But the fact that you understand that some evil principle seems to be trying to influence you, gives you a weapon by which you can combat it. Leave your little mirror here with me, and force yourself to take up

with some work which will afford scope for all your mental energy. Do not go to the avenue; work all day, from early to late, then take a long walk, and spend your evenings in the company of your friends. Eat heartily, and drink heavy, nourishing wines. You see I am endeavoring to combat your fixed idea of the face in the window of the deserted house and in the mirror, by diverting your mind to other things, and by strengthening your body. You yourself must help me in this."

I was very reluctant to part with my mirror. The physician, who had already taken it, seemed to notice my hesitation. He breathed upon the glass and holding it up to me, he asked: "Do you see anything?"

"Nothing at all," I answered, for so it was.

"Now breathe on the glass yourself," said the physician, laying the mirror in my hands.

I did as he requested. There was the vision even more clearly than ever before.

"There she is!" I cried aloud.

The physician looked into the glass, and then said: "I cannot see anything. But I will confess to you that when I looked into this glass, a queer shiver overcame me, passing away almost at once. Now do it once more."

I breathed upon the glass again and the physician laid his hand upon the back of my neck. The face appeared again, and the physician, looking into the mirror over my shoulder, turned pale. Then he took the little glass from my hands, looked at it attentively, and locked it into his desk, returning to me after a few moments' silent thought.

"Follow my instructions strictly," he said. "I must confess to you that I do not yet understand those moments of your vision. But I hope to be able to tell you more about it very soon."

Difficult as it was to me, I forced myself to live absolutely according to the doctor's orders. I soon felt the benefit of the steady work and the nourishing diet, and yet I was not free from those terrible attacks, which would come either at noon, or, more intensely still, at midnight. Even

in the midst of a merry company, in the enjoyment of wine and song, glowing daggers seemed to pierce my heart, and all the strength of my intellect was powerless to resist their might over me. I was obliged to retire, and could not return to my friends until I had recovered from my condition of lethargy. It was in one of these attacks, an unusually strong one, that such an irresistible, mad longing for the picture of my dreams came over me, that I hurried out into the street and ran toward the mysterious house. While still at a distance from it, I seemed to see lights shining out through the fast-closed blinds, but when I came nearer I saw that all was dark. Crazy with my desire I rushed to the door; it fell back before the pressure of my hand. I stood in the dimly lighted vestibule, enveloped in a heavy, close atmosphere. My heart beat in strange fear and impatience. Then suddenly a long, sharp tone, as from a woman's throat, shrilled through the house. I know not how it happened that I found myself suddenly in a great hall brilliantly lighted and furnished in old-fashioned magnificence of golden chairs and strange Japanese ornaments. Strongly perfumed incense arose in blue clouds about me. "Welcome—welcome, sweet bridegroom! the hour has come, our bridal hour!" I heard these words in a woman's voice, and as little as I can tell, how I came into the room, just so little do I know how it happened that suddenly a tall, youthful figure, richly dressed, seemed to arise from the blue mists. With the repeated shrill cry: "Welcome, sweet bridegroom!" she came toward me with outstretched arms—and a yellow face, distorted with age and madness, stared into mine! I fell back in terror, but the fiery, piercing glance of her eyes, like the eyes of a snake, seemed to hold me spellbound. I did not seem able to turn my eyes from this terrible old woman, I could not move another step. She came still nearer, and it seemed to me suddenly as if her hideous face were only a thin mask, beneath which I saw the features of the beautiful maiden of my vision. Already I felt the touch of her hands, when suddenly she

fell at my feet with a loud scream, and a voice behind me cried:

"Oho, is the devil playing his tricks with your grace again? To bed, to bed, your grace. Else there will be blows, mighty blows!"

I turned quickly and saw the old steward in his night clothes, swinging a whip above his head. He was about to strike the screaming figure at my feet when I caught at his arm. But he shook me from him, exclaiming: "The devil, sir! That old Satan would have murdered you if I had not come to your aid. Get away from here at once!"

I rushed from the hall, and sought in vain in the darkness for the door of the house. Behind me I heard the hissing blows of the whip and the old woman's screams. I drew breath to call aloud for help, when suddenly the ground gave way under my feet; I fell down a short flight of stairs, bringing up with such force against a door at the bottom that it sprang open, and I measured my length on the floor of a small room. From the hastily vacated bed, and from the familiar brown coat hanging over a chair, I saw that I was in the bedchamber of the old steward. There was a trampling on the stair, and the old man himself entered hastily, throwing himself at my feet. "By all the saints, sir," he entreated with folded hands, "whoever you may be, and however her grace, that old Satan of a witch has managed to entice you to this house, do not speak to anyone of what has happened here. It will cost me my position. Her crazy excellency has been punished, and is bound fast in her bed. Sleep well, good sir, sleep softly and sweetly. It is a warm and beautiful July night. There is no moon, but the stars shine brightly. A quiet good night to you." While talking, the old man had taken up a lamp, had led me out of the basement, pushed me out of the house door, and locked it behind me. I hurried home quite bewildered, and you can imagine that I was too much confused by the grewsome secret to be able to form any explanation of it in my own mind for the first few days. Only this much was certain, that I was

now free from the evil spell that had held me captive so long. All my longing for the magic vision in the mirror had disappeared, and the memory of the scene in the deserted house was like the recollection of an unexpected visit to a madhouse. It was evident beyond a doubt that the steward was the tyrannical guardian of a crazy woman of noble birth, whose condition was to be hidden from the world. But the mirror? and all the other magic? Listen, and I will tell you more about it.

Some few days later I came upon Count P. at an evening entertainment. He drew me to one side and said, with a smile, "Do you know that the secrets of our deserted house are beginning to be revealed?" I listened with interest; but before the count could say more the doors of the dining-room were thrown open, and the company proceeded to the table. Quite lost in thought at the words I had just heard, I had given a young lady my arm, and had taken my place mechanically in the ceremonious procession. I led my companion to the seats arranged for us, and then turned to look at her for the first time. The vision of my mirror stood before me, feature for feature, there was no deception possible! I trembled to my innermost heart, as you can imagine; but I discovered that there was not the slightest echo even, in my heart, of the mad desire which had ruled me so entirely when my breath drew out the magic picture from the glass. My astonishment, or rather my terror, must have been apparent in my eyes. The girl looked at me in such surprise that I endeavored to control myself sufficiently to remark that I must have met her somewhere before. Her short answer, to the effect that this could hardly be possible, as she had come to the city only yesterday for the first time in her life, bewildered me still more and threw me into an awkward silence. The sweet glance from her gentle eyes brought back my courage, and I began a tentative exploring of this new companion's mind. I found that I had before me a sweet and delicate being, suffering from some psychic trouble. At a particularly merry turn of the conversation, when I would throw

in a daring word like a dash of pepper, she would smile, but her smile was pained, as if a wound had been touched. "You are not very merry to-night, countess. Was it the visit this morning?" An officer sitting near us had spoken these words to my companion, but before he could finish his remark his neighbor had grasped him by the arm and whispered something in his ear, while a lady at the other side of the table, with glowing cheeks and angry eyes, began to talk loudly of the opera she had heard last evening. Tears came to the eyes of the girl sitting beside me. "Am I not foolish?" She turned to me. A few moments before she had complained of headache. "Merely the usual evidences of a nervous headache," I answered in an easy tone, "and there is nothing better for it than the merry spirit which bubbles in the foam of this poet's nectar." With these words I filled her champagne glass, and she sipped at it as she threw me a look of gratitude. Her mood brightened, and all would have been well had I not touched a glass before me with unexpected strength, arousing from it a shrill, high tone. My companion grew deadly pale, and I myself felt a sudden shiver, for the sound had exactly the tone of the mad woman's voice in the deserted house.

While we were drinking coffee I made an opportunity to get to the side of Count P. He understood the reason for my movement. "Do you know that your neighbor is Countess Edwina S.? And do you know also that it is her mother's sister who lives in the deserted house, incurably mad for many years? This morning both mother and daughter went to see the unfortunate woman. The old steward, the only person who is able to control the countess in her outbreaks, is seriously ill, and they say that the sister has finally revealed the secret to Dr. K. This eminent physician will endeavor to cure the patient, or if this is not possible, at least to prevent her terrible outbreaks of mania. This is all that I know yet."

Others joined us and we were obliged to change the subject. Dr. K. was the physician to whom I had turned in my own anxiety, and you can well imagine that I hurried

to him as soon as I was free, and told him all that had happened to me in the last days. I asked him to tell me as much as he could about the mad woman, for my own peace of mind; and this is what I learned from him under promise of secrecy.

"Angelica, Countess Z.," thus the doctor began, "had already passed her thirtieth year, but was still in full possession of great beauty, when Count S., although much younger than she, became so fascinated by her charm that he wooed her with ardent devotion and followed her to her father's home to try his luck there. But scarcely had the count entered the house, scarcely had he caught sight of Angelica's younger sister, Gabrielle, when he awoke as from a dream. The elder sister appeared faded and colorless beside Gabrielle, whose beauty and charm so enthralled the count that he begged her hand of her father. Count Z. gave his consent easily, as there was no doubt of Gabrielle's feelings toward her suitor. Angelica did not show the slightest anger at her lover's faithlessness. 'He believes that he has forsaken me, the foolish boy! He does not perceive that he was but my toy, a toy of which I had tired.' Thus she spoke in proud scorn, and not a look or an action on her part belied her words. But after the ceremonious betrothal of Gabrielle to Count S., Angelica was seldom seen by the members of her family. She did not appear at the dinner table, and it was said that she spent most of her time walking alone in the neighboring wood.

"A strange occurrence disturbed the monotonous quiet of life in the castle. The hunters of Count Z., assisted by peasants from the village, had captured a band of gypsies who were accused of several robberies and murders which had happened recently in the neighborhood. The men were brought to the castle courtyard, fettered together on a long chain, while the women and children were packed on a cart. Noticeable among the last was a tall, haggard old woman of terrifying aspect, wrapped from head to foot in a red shawl. She stood upright in the cart, and in an imperious tone demanded that she should be allowed to

descend. The guards were so awed by her manner and appearance that they obeyed her at once.

" Count Z. came down to the courtyard and commanded that the gang should be placed in the prisons under the castle. Suddenly Countess Angelica rushed out of the door, her hair all loose, fear and anxiety in her pale face. Throwing herself on her knees, she cried in a piercing voice, ' Let these people go! Let these people go! They are innocent! Father, let these people go! If you shed one drop of their blood I will pierce my heart with this knife!' The countess swung a shining knife in the air and then sank swooning to the ground. ' Yes, my beautiful darling—my golden child—I knew you would not let them hurt us,' shrilled the old woman in red. She cowered beside the countess and pressed disgusting kisses to her face and breast, murmuring crazy words. She took from out the recesses of her shawl a little vial in which a tiny goldfish seemed to swim in some silver-clear liquid. She held the vial to the countess's heart. The latter regained consciousness immediately. When her eyes fell on the gypsy woman, she sprang up, clasped the old creature ardently in her arms, and hurried with her into the castle.

" Count Z., Gabrielle, and her lover, who had come out during this scene, watched it in astonished awe. The gypsies appeared quite indifferent. They were loosed from their chains and taken separately to the prisons. Next morning Count Z. called the villagers together. The gypsies were led before them and the count announced that he had found them to be innocent of the crimes of which they were accused, and that he would grant them free passage through his domains. To the astonishment of all present, their fetters were struck off and they were set at liberty. The red-shawled woman was not among them. It was whispered that the gypsy captain, recognizable from the golden chain about his neck and the red feather in his high Spanish hat, had paid a secret visit to the count's room the night before. But it was discovered, a short time after the release of the gypsies, that they were

indeed guiltless of the robberies and murders that had disturbed the district.

" The date set for Gabrielle's wedding approached. One day, to her great astonishment, she saw several large wagons in the courtyard being packed high with furniture, clothing, linen, with everything necessary for a complete household outfit. The wagons were driven away, and the following day Count Z. explained that, for many reasons, he had thought it best to grant Angelica's odd request that she be allowed to set up her own establishment in his house in X. He had given the house to her, and had promised her that no member of the family, not even he himself, should enter it without her express permission. He added also, that, at her urgent request, he had permitted his own valet to accompany her, to take charge of her household.

" When the wedding festivities were over, Count S. and his bride departed for their home, where they spent a year in cloudless happiness. Then the count's health failed mysteriously. It was as if some secret sorrow gnawed at his vitals, robbing him of joy and strength. All efforts of his young wife to discover the source of his trouble were fruitless. At last, when the constantly recurring fainting spells threatened to endanger his very life, he yielded to the entreaties of his physicians and left his home, ostensibly for Pisa. His young wife was prevented from accompanying him by the delicate condition of her own health.

" And now," said the doctor, " the information given me by Countess S. became, from this point on, so rhapsodical that a keen observer only could guess at the true coherence of the story. Her baby, a daughter, born during her husband's absence, was spirited away from the house, and all search for it was fruitless. Her grief at this loss deepened to despair, when she received a message from her father stating that her husband, whom all believed to be in Pisa, had been found dying of heart trouble in Angelica's home in X., and that Angelica herself had become a dangerous maniac. The old count added that all this horror had

so shaken his own nerves that he feared he would not long survive it.

"As soon as Gabrielle was able to leave her bed, she hurried to her father's castle. One night, prevented from sleeping by visions of the loved ones she had lost, she seemed to hear a faint crying, like that of an infant, before the door of her chamber. Lighting her candle she opened the door. Great Heaven! there cowered the old gypsy woman, wrapped in her red shawl, staring up at her with eyes that seemed already glazing in death. In her arms she held a little child, whose crying had aroused the countess. Gabrielle's heart beat high with joy—it was her child—her lost daughter! She snatched the infant from the gypsy's arms, just as the woman fell at her feet lifeless. The countess's screams awoke the house, but the gypsy was quite dead and no effort to revive her met with success.

"The old count hurried to X. to endeavor to discover something that would throw light upon the mysterious disappearance and reappearance of the child. Angelica's madness had frightened away all her female servants; the valet alone remained with her. She appeared at first to have become quite calm and sensible. But when the count told her the story of Gabrielle's child she clapped her hands and laughed aloud, crying: 'Did the little darling arrive? You buried her, you say? How the feathers of the gold pheasant shine in the sun! Have you seen the green lion with the fiery blue eyes?' Horrified the count perceived that Angelica's mind was gone beyond a doubt, and he resolved to take her back with him to his estates, in spite of the warnings of his old valet. At the mere suggestion of removing her from the house Angelica's ravings increased to such an extent as to endanger her own life and that of the others.

"When a lucid interval came again Angelica entreated her father, with many tears, to let her live and die in the house she had chosen. Touched by her terrible trouble he granted her request, although he believed the confession

which slipped from her lips during this scene to be a fantasy of her madness. She told him that Count S. had returned to her arms, and that the child which the gypsy had taken to her father's house was the fruit of their love. The rumor went abroad in the city that Count Z. had taken the unfortunate woman to his home; but the truth was that she remained hidden in the deserted house under the care of the valet. Count Z. died a short time ago, and Countess Gabrielle came here with her daughter Edwina to arrange some family affairs. It was not possible for her to avoid seeing her unfortunate sister. Strange things must have happened during this visit, but the countess has not confided anything to me, saying merely that she had found it necessary to take the mad woman away from the old valet. It had been discovered that he had controlled her outbreaks by means of force and physical cruelty; and that also, allured by Angelica's assertions that she could make gold, he had allowed himself to assist her in her weird operations.

"It would be quite unnecessary," thus the physician ended his story, "to say anything more to you about the deeper inward relationship of all these strange things. It is clear to my mind that it was you who brought about the catastrophe, a catastrophe which will mean recovery or speedy death for the sick woman. And now I will confess to you that I was not a little alarmed, horrified even, to discover that—when I had set myself in magnetic communication with you by placing my hand on your neck—I could see the picture in the mirror with my own eyes. We both know now that the reflection in the glass was the face of Countess Edwina."

I repeat Dr. K.'s words in saying that, to my mind also, there is no further comment that can be made on all these facts. I consider it equally unnecessary to discuss at any further length with you now the mysterious relationship between Angelica, Edwina, the old valet, and myself—a relationship which seemed the work of a malicious demon who was playing his tricks with us. I will add only that

I left the city soon after all these events, driven from the place by an oppression I could not shake off. The uncanny sensation left me suddenly a month or so later, giving way to a feeling of intense relief that flowed through all my veins with the warmth of an electric current. I am convinced that this change within me came about in the moment when the mad woman died.

Thus did Theodore end his narrative. His friends had much to say about his strange adventure, and they agreed with him that the odd and unusual, and the truly marvelous as well, were mingled in a strange and grewsome manner in his story. When they parted for the night, Franz shook Theodore's hand gently, as he said with a smile: "Good night, you Spallanzani bat, you."

Karl Rosner

The Versegy Case

IT was my friend Richard Plank who first told me the entire truth about the Versegy case. This remarkable affair, occurring in Budapest in the early 90's, had caused great excitement, an excitement shared by the police of all Austria. Plank, who was a detective in the service of the Viennese police department, had been the one to bring light into the darkness of this mysterious case. After twenty years' service, Plank had settled down to private life in the same little suburb where my home was situated. He was my neighbor, and this fact, as well as our mutual fondness for the game of chess, made firm friends of us. In the course of the long evenings we spent in each other's company he told me many incidents of his adventurous life. Among the most interesting of the stories was the one about the Versegy case, a narrative which I shall write down here exactly as Plank told it to me.

The Versegy case (he began) was one of the few of real importance which came to me during my last years of service. What made it particularly interesting to me was the fact that through a mere chance I was enabled to observe the events from their very beginning. This is something which happens but seldom in criminal cases. Usually the detective is sent for only when the clumsiness of local police authorities has so garbled the material that it is of little use to him. We detectives consider it a great piece of luck when we are able to study a crime from the beginning, unhampered by all assistance, well meant or otherwise, from our superiors in the police force. This good luck fell to my share in the Versegy case.

My Viennese chief of the moment, Commissioner Franz,

had sent me to Budapest to round up a company of Roumanian swindlers who had been operating disastrously in Vienna. Some members of the band had been seen in Budapest, and I was detailed to follow them up. Aided by an unusually intelligent commissioner of police, it was an easy matter for me to run the gang to earth. I was rather attracted to the young Budapest commissioner. He had considerable talent for the business, except for his over-sanguine temperament, perhaps.

The affair of the swindlers was settled to our satisfaction, and I was standing one day in the office of the young commissioner, just about to take my farewell of him, when an attendant announced a gentleman outside, who was anxious to speak to someone in authority. The man handed us a card which bore the name "Professor Sandor Versegy." Before I could leave the room our visitor rushed in, evidently in great excitement. He stammered an excuse for his hasty entrance, then broke out into a rush of incoherent words. With difficulty we gathered the facts that his safe had been opened and that he had been robbed of a large sum. The poor man seemed utterly upset, and he finally sank down on a bench near the wall and burst into loud sobs.

While the commissioner was endeavoring to soothe him with kindly words of sympathy, I stood watching the gentleman closely. Professor Sandor Versegy was a nervous little man of about fifty years of age, dressed in clothes of fashionable cut. In spite of the disordered condition of his nerves at the moment, his face was clearly that of a man accustomed to intellectual pursuits. It was also plain to be seen that overwork and indulgence in stimulants had aged him prematurely. His appearance was sympathetic, or would have been so, except for the uncontrollable manner in which he gave way to his feelings. His excitability was so great as to point to a lack of mental balance.

When the professor had become somewhat calmer I turned to the door, thinking it better to take my departure. But the commissioner entreated me to remain and listen to what our visitor might have to say. I was quite ready

to do so, for I had somehow become interested in the stranger, and I felt that the case might develop unexpected features.

Through his paroxysms of excitement, through his incoherent stammering broken by uncontrolled sobs, we managed to get at the following facts. Our visitor was a former professor of the Budapest University, from which he had retired a little over a year before, because of a nervous trouble which made it impossible for him to continue his work. Since that time he had been under the care of a leading nerve specialist, and about six weeks before his sudden appearance at the police station his physician had sent him to a sanitarium near Vienna. The treatment there had improved his health to a great extent. His wife had accompanied him, his servants had been dismissed for the time of his absence, and his apartment closed. The night before, he and his wife had returned from their journey and had gone to bed immediately. This morning he had entered his study for the first time and discovered that his safe had been opened and securities to the value of 150,000 gulden stolen, as well as several costly pieces of jewelry. As far as he could see, no damage had been done to the outer doors of the apartment, although these doors were fastened by a patent safety lock as well as by the ordinary lock and key.

The commissioner inquired whether any of the servants, or any other person whatever, had been in possession of duplicate keys during the professor's absence. The latter answered that there was no one who could possibly have a second key to his apartment. He was then asked whether he suspected any particular person. He hesitated a moment, then, with a vehemence which seemed forced, he answered sharply, "No."

The commissioner called in an assistant, and the four of us entered a cab and drove to the professor's home. The apartment was situated in one of the finest new streets of Budapest, the house was handsomely built, and the janitor on watch to observe everyone who went in or out. The

professor's apartment was on the third floor. Before we opened the door, both the commissioner and myself examined the locks. As far as we could see then, they were quite uninjured. We postponed a more minute examination until later and followed the professor into the apartment.

Inside the corridor there was a penetrating odor of camphor and naphtha, and the close air of rooms which have been carefully shut up for several weeks. In the half-dark corridor stood several trunks, and various articles of clothing—an overcoat lined with brown fur, a rain-coat, and a lady's jacket—were scattered over them. We passed through the hall into the drawing-room and through this into the professor's study. As we stood on the threshold, another door opened and a slender young woman of great beauty crossed the room to join us. The professor introduced her as his wife. The contrast of the calm nobility of her manner with the professor's nervous demeanor was sufficiently remarkable to impress itself strongly upon us. She appeared to look upon their loss as an unfortunate accident, which called for calmness and decision rather than for useless complaining. She opened the door of the study for us and we saw the disorder caused by the crime. The doors of the safe yawned open. On a chair beside it lay a disordered heap of letters and papers. Other documents had been crumpled or torn up, and scattered about with an almost demonstrative vandalism. The furniture had been pushed out of place, and on the floor around the safe was a litter of burnt matches, candle ends, cigarette ashes, and broken scraps of iron.

This first glimpse of the room made a peculiar impression upon me. I had been in police service for nearly twenty years, and I knew the habits and customs of the under world as few others did. What struck my attention first was the unusual disorder of the room, a disorder not at all typical in robbery cases. The thief may ruin his victim—that is part of his professional work. But once he has taken possession of the booty, he appears to feel a sort of paradoxical sympathy for the loser, and does not wish to frighten him by a

too early discovery of what has happened. And furthermore, he does not desire this early discovery himself, as any delay will give him the greater chance for escape. But in this case either the robber had been interrupted before it was possible for him to rearrange the room, or else he had intentionally created as much disorder as possible. This last point was not quite clear in my mind; it was only a suspicion aroused by the ostentatiously rough treatment of the safe and the papers.

A question from the commissioner interrupted my thoughts: "Is this all just as you found it, professor? You didn't change anything in the room? These papers and this rubbish were lying about just as they are now, when you entered the room this morning?"

The professor nodded in answer to the question. "Everything is just as I found it, except that I opened the window and examined the interior of the safe. I intended to gather up the papers, but my wife told me not to do so. She said that I ought to leave everything just as it was until it had been examined by the police."

The commissioner bowed to the lady and continued, "Do you know whether any other pieces of furniture have been damaged, or whether anything else has been stolen, besides the securities and the jewels?" Both the professor and his wife shook their heads, and the former answered, "The jewels and securities were inclosed in a small box placed inside the safe. The box is in its place, but open and empty. The thief might well have been satisfied with its contents."

"You say the thief—why do you think there was only one?"

The professor answered with another question: "Do you think there were several of them?"

"Robberies like this are usually the work of two or more thieves, and it is also customary, however rich the loot in money or papers may be, that the thief will take some little trifle, often valueless, which happens to strike his eye. It would be strange if we did not find traces of it in this case."

The professor looked about uneasily, as if he were searching for the absence of some other object in the room. We now entered the study and began the closer examination. We picked up the more intimate traces of the crime, the matches, bits of candles, and broken scraps of iron. Among them was something of importance, the broken point of a file. The little tool was triangular in shape and this broken piece was torn off in a rather peculiar manner. We also gathered up carefully the cigarette ashes which were scattered about the floor and two stubs of cigarettes which had been smoked almost to the tip.

Then we turned our attention to the safe itself. And here we made a discovery which caused the commissioner and myself to pause for a moment and look each other in the eyes in astonishment. Greatly as the safe had suffered on the outside from ill-treatment, in spite of the marks of blows and filing on its lock and its hinges, it was plain to us that it had been opened by the key which belonged to it, and that all the rough usage had been given it after opening. Just below the middle lock in the iron frame there was a sharp depression—one might easily think that this was where the robber had entered the point of his short, heavy crowbar, the instrument customary in breaking open safes. But on the door itself there was no trace of the companion mark. The depression in the frame, therefore, could be nothing but the mark of a blow given after the door of the safe had been opened. And we found more such marks.

Our discovery threw the commissioner into a fever of excitement and he was about to put another inquiry, when I motioned him not to do so. Unseen by the others, I beckoned to him to continue our investigation before saying anything to the owners of the house. And I had soon discovered something else of equal importance. All these scars, and all the breakage that had been inflicted upon the safe, did not show at any point the traces of tools used by professional thieves. I may remark here that for the trained criminalist each tool used in robberies leaves marks which are easily recognized. There was not one such mark

to be found in all this ill-treatment of the safe. The more we looked at it, the more we could see that it had been caused by a few simple blows of some ordinary tool.

When I had fully decided upon this, I turned suddenly to the professor with the question, "Have you an ax in the house?"

"An ax?" He looked at me questioningly; he seemed anxious to find the reason for my inquiry.

"Yes, an ax or a hatchet. I would like to have any tool of that character for a few moments."

The professor looked at his wife as if uncertain what to do. But the lady had already turned to leave the room, and in a few moments she returned with a good-sized kitchen hatchet, which she handed to me. "Will this do?"

One look at the hatchet was sufficient. Its edge showed fresh, deep scars, and even the head was rubbed smooth from heavy blows. "Thank you," I said, handing the hatchet to the commissioner without another word. He took it over to the safe and laid the edge in the impression under the lock. It fitted exactly.

He looked over to where the professor was standing. He hesitated a moment, and there was an oppressive silence in the room. Then the commissioner spoke, with a sharp emphasis and a slight trembling of excitement in his voice: "It is rather remarkable, professor, that the thieves should have maltreated your safe with your own hatchet——"

"What?" The professor had come nearer and was staring at the commissioner's hands, which still held the ax to the frame of the safe. His wife approached the safe also and saw the truth. "But I found the hatchet in the kitchen in its usual place."

The commissioner shrugged his shoulders. "It was returned to its place after having been used here." Then he turned to his assistant, adding to his dictated report the fact that Professor Versegy, who claimed to have been robbed of a large sum, had acknowledged as his property a hatchet which had been used in the breaking of the safe, and that the hatchet had been taken into possession by the police.

The commissioner's voice had a sharpness which showed me that his opinion was already formed.

During this time I had been gathering up the papers scattered about the floor and had placed them on the desk. I now began to look through them hastily. I found family documents, receipts for paid taxes, a college diploma, lease contracts—then I suddenly halted. My eyes had fallen upon a document which suggested a sudden and terrible thought. I looked at the nervous little man in his carefully fashionable clothes, at the gravely beautiful woman who stood beside him, and a cold shiver ran down my spine. The paper in my hands was the policy of an insurance company stating that Professor Versegy had insured himself against robbery for a sum of 150,000 gulden.

I cannot tell how long I may have stood there, trying to control the emotion that had seized me, when I was aroused by someone looking over my shoulder. Then I heard the commissioner's voice, into which a note of unconcealed triumph had come.

"Then you insured yourself against robbery, professor? You didn't think to inform us of that?"

I looked up and saw the professor standing near the little table, his fingers gripping the shining mahogany top. He was trying to look unconcerned, but his cheeks were pale and his lips trembled.

"Yes," he exclaimed, "certainly, I am insured—I took out the insurance a year ago—that is the one good thing in all this trouble——" He paused; a queer sort of sob seemed to close his throat, as if he were struggling to get the better of his excitement.

Then we heard his wife's voice. "Did you not tell the gentlemen that we were insured, Sandor? How could you forget a thing like that? Why, that is the reason, sir, that we are able to support this great loss with a certain amount of calm."

The commissioner did not turn his eyes from the professor's face as he answered, "Calm? I should think the gentleman is sufficiently excited about it. It was his nerv-

ousness that first caught my attention, when he came to make his report at the station. And now we find that he is insured in a manner to completely cover his loss. We can't see any reason for his great excitement."

"My poor husband is ill. We have just returned from the sanitarium where he was being treated. In my opinion it is quite cause enough for excitement—to return to our home and find ourselves robbed like this—even if we are insured against the loss." These words were spoken with decision and with cool reserve; they were evidently the expression of her conviction. It was quite clear to me that however dark the mystery which confronted us here might be, this woman knew nothing about it.

The commissioner seemed to share my feelings, for, when he spoke again, his voice was calmer and his tone had more reserve. His endeavor to treat the matter in a calm and business-like way was quite evident. He had controlled himself sufficiently to be able to keep his own thoughts and suspicions to himself. He took up his official inquiry again.

"Then you left your home on the 27th of March and closed your apartment?"

The professor nodded. "Yes. We went first to Vienna and consulted a specialist there, to whom my own physician had sent me."

"When did you arrive in Vienna, and how long did you remain there?"

"We reached Vienna the evening of the day of our departure and were there—Ilka, how long did we stay with Lajos the first time?"

"Four days."

"Yes, that's it, four days, because it was April 1st when we got to the sanitarium in Kaltenleutgeben——"

The commissioner broke in here. "Pardon me, but who is Lajos?"

"Lajos? He is my brother. I have a brother in Vienna, a stepbrother, Lajos Révai—that is, he now calls himself Ludwig Révai—but we have always called him Lajos, and

we still do. When we passed through Vienna we stopped at his house both coming and going—we couldn't very well refuse——" The professor spoke quickly, over-hastily, then he broke off suddenly, as if he had lost the thread of his thought.

The commissioner began his questioning again, and we learned that the couple had remained in the sanitarium from the 1st of April until the 3d of May, and that they had then returned to Vienna, remaining with the professor's brother two days, and reaching their own home during the night from the 5th to the 6th of May.

During all the questioning the professor stood by the little table at which our assistant was seated. His eyes wandered uneasily about the room, but whenever he was obliged to give an answer he turned his gaze towards his wife, as if to ask for her corroboration for his words. He would occasionally throw in a question, "Is it not so, Ilka? That is right, is it not?—you remember it, too, don't you?"

And she would answer with a nod as if to calm him, "Yes, Sandor, it is just as you say; you are quite right." Once she laid her arm about his shoulder and looked at him tenderly, while she shook her head. "You should not excite yourself so, it is very bad for you; try to be calm."

But the professor could not seem to control his emotion; his eyes followed our every act, his features drawn and tense. When we had worked for about an hour and were looking carefully through all the scattered pieces of paper, the professor's wife, who had left the room, returned with a tray of glasses and a bottle of wine.

"We are obliged to be very informal," she said, "as our servants have not yet returned. But I can at least offer you a glass of wine." We declined, but the professor drank his glass at one gulp. A few moments later he said suddenly, "Would it disturb you if I smoked?" "Not at all," replied the commissioner. I raised my eyes from my work as the professor took from his pocket a cigarette case of engraved silver, drew out a cigarette, and closed the case again. Act-

ing on one of those impulses by which the true detective does his best work, I put my hand in my own pocket as if seeking a cigar.

The professor, who was still watching us sharply, saw my motion, and opening his own case again, he handed it to me. "Have one of these. You couldn't easily find anything better."

As I lit the cigarette and blew out the mild, rather sweetish smoke, I knew for a certainty that it was the identical sort to which the stubs and the ashes we had found scattered about the safe belonged.

"Good, isn't it?" asked the professor, while I was studying the mark on the cigarette.

"Excellent! Do you buy them here?"

"No, you can't buy them here anywhere. They are sent to me directly from Pera—nobody else smokes them here."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I know it. They are made especially for me."

The commissioner stopped reading his papers and looked at me in inquiry. It was evident that he could not understand why I could discuss the subject of tobacco with the professor in as serious a moment as this. But I pretended not to notice, and asked, "May I have another of your cigarettes?"

The professor seemed astonished, but opened his case quickly. I took another cigarette and looked him firmly in the eyes. "Are you certain that this room was cleaned thoroughly before you went away?"

He was confused by my question and looked towards his wife, as if for help. "Cleaned? Why, of course it was cleaned."

"And you have not smoked in here until now?" He was quite at sea.

"No—I have not—I was in the room only a few moments——"

"Oh, yes, so you told us." Here I handed the commissioner the cigarette. "It is rather remarkable, then, that the man who plundered your safe smoked this same sort of

cigarettes, the brand you say is used by no one else here but yourself."

It was absolutely quiet in the room for a moment or two, and we all looked at the professor. He stood motionless, with a helpless expression, as if he had not yet understood the full meaning of my words, but was conscious that they meant some evil for him. The suspicion aroused in my mind by the sight of the insurance policy was greatly strengthened by the discovery of the cigarettes.

The professor's wife first broke the silence. "Why, Sandor, just look at this——" She came over to the table and looked at the two stubs we had found, beside which the commissioner laid the fresh cigarette. "Why, just look, it is really the same sort—but how is that possible?"

I watched her as she spoke, but there was only an absolutely dazed surprise to be read in her face, a surprise about which there was no pretense. The professor approached the table with hesitation and looked down at the little bits of burnt paper which lay there in such terrible accusation against him. He stood motionless for a long time, his right hand catching at the edge of the table. I had the feeling that he was looking for a support to hide the trembling of his hand, and that he did not look up because he feared to meet our eyes.

Then he straightened up with a sudden start. His voice trembled as he said, "Yes, the cigarettes are evidently mine —beyond a doubt—I cannot deny it, but——"

The commissioner interrupted him, "Pardon me, you say you 'cannot deny.' Isn't that a rather peculiar word to use under the circumstances?"

The professor looked helplessly about him as the commissioner continued, with a note of ironical politeness in his voice, "If you are so utterly at a loss in this matter, why do you remark that you 'cannot deny' a circumstance which may afford us an important clew to the finding of the criminal?"

The professor put his hand to his forehead as if seeking to understand this thing, this unknown evil drawing about

him like a net. "It was a word—merely a word," he said. "I didn't mean anything by it." And then hesitatingly, but in evident emotion, he continued, "I do not understand you at all. I report this crime to you and you treat me as if I were the criminal myself. I must say that I think this rather peculiar——" His anger trembled in his voice.

The commissioner shrugged his shoulders and turned to me. "Mr. Plank, I think we have already discovered enough to spare ourselves further trouble here. That is, unless you have any further questions to ask of Professor Versegy."

I turned to the professor. "May I ask if you left any of these cigarettes lying about here during your absence? In that case it would be easy to understand that the thief had made free of them and smoked them while he was busy at your safe."

The commissioner looked at me in surprise. The wording of my question seemed to him dangerously near giving the suspected man a chance to recover his position. The professor seemed wondering whether he should grasp the opportunity or not. Then he shook his and answered, "No, there were none of the cigarettes in the house. In fact my supply was almost run out when we went away, so I took with me all that were left and ordered a new lot to be sent to Vienna——" He stopped suddenly, his face startlingly pale, his eyes staring.

The commissioner gathered up some of the papers and then addressed the professor again. "Then you wish us to take up the case, and to act on your report? Of course I have no right to stop the investigation——"

The professor's face twitched; he staggered back against the table, and the commissioner smiled over at me, with a shrug of his shoulders. Mrs. Versegy answered for her husband, "Of course we wish to have the matter followed up, and we hope that you will be successful in catching the thief." Then she turned to her husband and the reserve in her voice melted into gentleness. "This has tired you, Sandor; won't you lie down for a little while?" He pressed

her hand and looked at her gratefully. Then he asked us, "Do you need me any longer?"

"Kindly sign this official report." He signed it with a trembling, uncertain hand.

When we returned to the corridor I unscrewed the two locks from the door and wrapped them up to take with me. We cautioned the professor and his wife against speaking to anyone about the matter and then we left the apartment.

A problem of this kind takes hold on me with a power stronger than myself. It fascinates me; it will not loosen its hold on me until I have solved it. This quality it is which has won for me a few modest triumphs in my profession, and has made me a tolerably good chess player. My superiors in the police department were very kind to me, and when I retired the newspapers had much to say about my "genius." But I know that there were other just as good heads in the department. What made me what I am was nothing further than the persistence with which I worked on any case that interested me. I liked the work; that may have helped a little. The Versegy case was of particular interest to me because there was so much that I did not understand, so much that made it vastly different from the average run of safe-robbery cases. A fever took hold of me, a burning desire to control the matter entirely, to work on the case independently of anyone else.

When I left the professor's house my first errand was to telegraph to the department in Vienna, asking for leave and authority to work on this case. Then, leaving the commissioner to his own researches, I sat down to a careful examination of the two locks of the apartment door. But the most careful investigation did not show the slightest trace of a violent opening of the door, nor even of an attempt to turn the locks with keys which did not belong to them. They were in perfect condition, without a scar or scratch. And the safety lock was of a very peculiar construction, a mechanism which would have puzzled the most able criminal.

I had just come to the end of my examination when the

commissioner entered my room. Acting upon my advice, he had sent a telegraphic list of the missing securities to various police stations with a request that a watch be set in the banks in case any of the papers should be presented for negotiation. He had also made inquiries about the professor, and had learned that the latter had been speculating in stocks and had recently lost considerable money. This last fact was grist to the commissioner's mill, for he was already firmly convinced that we had to do here with a pretended robbery, with a well-played comedy, by means of which the professor should get his 150,000 gulden insurance money. He was for arresting the professor at once, and it took all my eloquence to restrain him from what would have been an unpardonably hasty action. I could not prevent him from setting a watch on the house, to forestall any possible attempt at flight on the part of the suspected man.

The commissioner gathered up all the incriminating circumstances and marshaled then in fine array against the suspect. There were the hatchet, the cigarette stubs, the ashes, the lack of any trace of the use of professional burglar's tools; added to this there was the untouched condition of the locks and the uncertain, excited behavior of the professor himself. The motive was easily furnished by the insurance policy and by the fact that the professor had lost large sums in his speculations. All this made out a case better and stronger than many a one which has led to an arrest.

"The professor had his money in a bank until recently, they say. About a year ago he drew most of it out and kept it at home since then. Why did he do this? He himself explains it by saying that some recent bank failures and embezzlements alarmed him. Of course this is possible; but then there are the national banks and the safe deposits, which are absolutely secure. But he prefers instead to keep this large sum in his own house. And at the same time he takes out a policy to insure himself against robbery. This might seem a perfectly natural thing to do under the

circumstances, but might it not also be considered as a preparation for what has since happened—a preparation for the pretended robbery which will secure for him the sum of 150,000 gulden? Or rather, would have secured it for him, had he not permitted himself a few stupidities in setting the scene, or had he been better able to control his own behavior."

I listened to what the commissioner had to say and yet I shook my head. It was just these stupidities, and the uncertainty in the professor's manner, that made me feel more work was necessary.

Was it possible to believe that any man would use his own hatchet to batter his safe and then allow the hatchet to be shown without a protest? Was it possible that he could be so careless as to leave traces of his own particular brand of cigarettes about the room, a brand he knew was not sold in Budapest? And if he were really the criminal, would it not be to his interest to prevent any list of the missing securities from getting into the hands of the police, as he would naturally realize that through these securities the crime would be discovered? There was his nervousness, of course. But was not that explained by his illness, and by the fact that he may have realized our suspicions were turning against him?

But I said nothing of these things, advising the commissioner to go ahead in the matter with the greatest caution, and to avoid any haste in his actions regarding the professor. I also persuaded him, in sending his official report to the newspapers, to mention nothing more than the mere fact that there had been a robbery in the apartment of Professor Versegy during the latter's absence from town.

The afternoon of that day, the few hours which still remained to me before the news of the robbery had become public property through the press, I utilized for some further private research. But the result of my labors did not add much to a conviction of the professor's innocence.

I took my way to the Versegy house, with the intention of questioning the janitor. I wanted some added evidence as

to the dates of departure and return of the couple upstairs. I thought I might possibly learn something else of value, for whoever entered the house was obliged to pass the janitor's window. If the man had been at his post on the day the safe was robbed, he might know something which would be of use to me.

As I approached, I saw a city messenger lounging in a doorway opposite, smoking his pipe. In spite of his disguise and a false mustache I recognized the man as a vigilant of the Budapest police, one of the best in the office of my commissioner. It was evidently he who had been set to watch the house.

I walked past him, entered, and knocked at the door of the janitor's office. This official, who came out to greet me in an evident bad humor, appeared to be a Hungarian patriot, for he pretended at first not to speak a word of German. It did not take me long to discover that he was quite conversant with the language, but I thought it better to continue the conversation in Hungarian, as it might put him in a better mood, making him more useful for my purpose.

I soon found out that he was not very kindly disposed toward the couple on the third floor. There was no important reason for his dislike, apparently nothing more than the fact that the nervous professor had made some complaint about the noise made by the janitor's children when playing in the court. Since then the two men had not spoken nor even greeted each other when they met.

That I might induce the man to talk more freely, I appeared to take great interest in this simple matter. This proved to be my very best way to awaken the confidence and interest of the janitor, and to discover some facts which were of great importance.

"Then Professor Versegy complained about the noise in the house?" I said.

The janitor looked scornful. "I think sometimes he's not quite right in his head," he answered. "If I wasn't sorry for the man I'd get even with him now, all right."

The threat in his voice impressed me and I continued to question him. "Would you? What has happened? Has he been doing anything to complain of?"

The janitor threw an angry glance up the stairs before he replied with vehemence: "Has he? and he complains because my children made a little noise on the stairs! He seems to think he can make all the noise he likes himself, though! I'll tell him what I think of him if he has any more complaints to make!"

"Indeed! Then there's been noise in *his* apartment? Just recently, for instance?"

The janitor shook his head. "He's been away again."

"When was the noise then?"

"Why, when he came back from his journey."

I did not quite understand, and I asked, "But he came back last night, didn't he?"

The janitor appeared anxious to end our conversation and I took out my cigar case. "Do you smoke?"

He took a cigar, thanked me, and became more communicative. Puffing away, he continued to talk.

"Why yes, of course, he just came back last night—I mean came back with his wife and all his baggage. But between times he was here once, and it was then——"

I caught at the man's arm, interrupting him. His words were so unexpected, they were of such importance in the case, of such importance for the fate of the professor, that even my oft-proven calm deserted me for the moment. "What's that you say? The professor wasn't away all the time since the end of March?"

The janitor looked at me in astonishment. He did not seem to understand why his words should have made such an impression upon me. "Why, no," he answered, "he was here once between times, about a week after he went away first. He was here only for a few hours—but the noise he made in his apartment then—you'd have thought he was chopping up the furniture."

The hand with which I held the janitor's arm sank down at my side. I felt as if someone had thrown a pitcher of

cold water over me. Could it really be true? My brain reeled. . . .

I seemed to see the professor going away officially, then returning alone and in secret, setting the stage for the crime in his own apartment, then going away again, staying away for four weeks, returning officially and "discovering" the robbery—the robbery he had committed himself. I seemed to see him chopping at his safe with his kitchen hatchet until the noise could be heard out in the corridor, and then carelessly throwing away the incriminating cigarette stubs. All that I had seen during the morning went through my head once more, and yet I had a strange feeling of pity for him—of pity for his helplessness and his awkwardness.

And a great disappointment fell upon me. I seemed to see the commissioner standing before me, rubbing his hands in delight at his triumph. I could hear him say, "I think you can go home with an easy conscience now, Mr. Plank. Didn't I tell you that the man has planned the whole thing himself? It's a bad habit to be looking for secrets and mysteries everywhere; things are very simple sometimes. And we're not so stupid here in Budapest as people seem to think us——"

I put my hand to my forehead and tried to chase away these visions. It was all absurd of course, and my own reasons for believing in the professor's innocence were just as good as ever.

But here stood a man before me who asserted that Professor Versegy had not been away the entire time, but that he had returned for a few hours in secret. When I raised my eyes to look at the janitor I had become quite calm again.

"Are you quite certain that it was he?" I asked. "You are sure you've not made a mistake?"

The janitor shook the ashes from his cigar. "When I ain't sure of a thing, I don't say it. It was about the 3d or the 4th of April, in the afternoon—or it may have been nearly evening, perhaps about seven o'clock. It was getting dark already and I had to light my lamp to read my paper. Then I saw the professor opening the house door. He stood for

a minute in the door, then he went quickly past me, without greeting me, and ran upstairs. I thought to myself, "Ain't he the fool?—thinks he has to cut me dead to make me feel bad——"

"Sure it was he, are you?"

The janitor shrugged his shoulders scornfully. "I'm thinking I know the professor, who's lived here for five years. Didn't I see him quite plainly in his brown fur overcoat with the astrakhan collar—I noticed it particularly, because it was such a warm day, and——"

"A brown fur coat with an astrakhan collar?" I thought at once of the rather noticeable fur overcoat that I had seen that morning thrown over one of the trunks in the professor's apartment.

"Yes—a brown fur coat—he wears it during the winter—yes, and he had a yellow bag with him. You could see he'd just come from the train."

"And he went upstairs to his apartment?"

"Why, yes, of course."

"And then you heard the noise?"

"It might have been half an hour later. I remember it quite clearly, for I was just going upstairs to light the gas in the halls. I heard the noise when I got up to the second story. Then in the third story it was so loud that I was just going to ring the bell when it suddenly stopped. But I'll speak to him about it sometime, I thought to myself; and about two hours later, or two hours and a half, perhaps—it was pretty near ten o'clock, and I was just thinking of locking the house door—I saw him going out. He had his fur coat on again and was carrying his bag. And I thought to myself that I'd call out to him and ask him what the noise was and tell him it wouldn't do here in the house. As he ran past me I did call out, but he shook his head and ran on all the faster, as if he was in a terrible hurry. Then I thought to myself, he's going to catch a train perhaps, so I let him go."

The janitor paused a moment, then he continued, "Yes, yes, the professor's a queer sort of a man——"

Just then a little old woman came through the doorway and handed the janitor the evening paper. He looked carelessly down the columns of the first page. I knew that in a moment he would have seen the reports about the robbery. I laid my hand on his arm, and when he looked up I opened my coat and showed him my official badge. Then I told him what had happened and that I was engaged in the search for the thief.

He looked at me in the greatest astonishment. "A robbery? Here in this house? But that isn't possible! Don't I see everyone who goes in and out——"

"And you haven't seen anyone, during the last six weeks, who seemed at all suspicious?" He thought the matter over for a moment and then shook his head. "No, not a soul."

"Well, I'm going upstairs to see the professor and make some more inquiries, but before I leave you I'd like to ask you not to mention our conversation just now to anyone. We want to work as quietly as possible. Will you promise me this?"

The janitor's eyes shone with the excitement which the news of any crime, of any mystery happening within the circle of their acquaintance, usually awakens in people of his class. He seemed to understand that everything he had said or might say would be of importance, and he laid his hand solemnly on mine. "Yes, I promise you. And if there's anything else I can do for you——"

"Thanks, I'll let you know. And now, good-by."

I went slowly upstairs to the third-floor apartment. While I was pondering over all I had heard, I was also listening for any noise in the hall below. The janitor must have stood for a long time without moving, on the spot where I had left him. I had almost reached the third story when I heard his step through the hall and the click of his office door closing behind him.

I rang the bell, and in a few seconds I heard steps coming through the hall of the apartment. I felt that someone was looking at me through the peep-hole in the door; then the

latch was thrown back and the door opened. The professor's wife stood before me and answered my greeting with anxiety in her face. "Mr. Plank—you are here again? Have you found any clew?" I looked at her as she stepped back and invited me to come in, and again I felt as I had felt that morning. Whatever may have happened here, this woman knew nothing of it!

"We have learned some few things," I answered, as she closed the door behind me, "but that is not the reason for my coming. I wanted to return your keys to you and to put the locks on your door again. My examination has shown me that there is not the slightest possibility of an attempt having been made to open these locks with keys which did not belong to them."

Her astonishment was genuine. "Yes, but then how——?"

I shrugged my shoulders, took out the package with the two locks, laid one of them on a trunk and began to screw the other into its place on the door. Thrown across the top of another trunk lay the brown fur overcoat that I had noticed that morning, the coat of which the janitor had spoken. It was made of brown fur, covered on the outside with light coffee-brown cloth, and trimmed with a collar of close-curled black astrakhan. It was a very conspicuous garment, easily recognizable when once seen.

The professor's wife watched me calmly as I worked at the door. Suddenly she asked, "You wish to avoid speaking of what you have discovered?" I stopped what I was doing and straightened up. "Yes, I should prefer not to say anything. It is better to avoid discussing one's ideas until they have become certainties."

"And you are not yet certain?"

My glance fell again on the fur coat. Was not that proof absolute? Could there be any doubt now in the evidence against the professor? Was it not absurd, in the face of all this evidence, that I should give way to the doubt I still felt, to that something within me which warned me against coming to any decision? This doubt, this hesitation, seemed

to me like the voice of conscience, calling to me again and again: There is something else back of all this!

"No," I said then, in a tone so unexpectedly loud that I was surprised at the sound of my own voice. Then after a few moments more of work on the door I inquired, "Has the professor gone out?"

"No, he is at home. He is resting. This excitement has tired him very much."

The first lock was back in its place and I was just about to begin on the second, when the professor's voice called out from an inner room, "Ilka!"

His wife murmured an excuse and left me alone.

And then, as I took up the second lock, my eyes fell on the fur coat again. It suddenly came to me to examine its pockets while I had the chance. I went through them hastily, but they were all empty. I found nothing, except a tiny crushed tramway ticket in a corner of a small, upper side-pocket. I was about to drop the little scrap of paper in disappointment, when I heard the lady's step again, and I instinctively pushed it into my own pocket.

The second lock was in its place a few moments later. When I finished my work, I turned with another question to the mistress of the house. "Is your husband feeling any better now?"

"Yes, thank you, I think he is a little better."

"He has some nervous trouble, has he not?"

She seemed touched by my sympathy and looked at me gratefully. "Yes, indeed, it is an unfortunate and depressing disease. He has been ill for nearly two years now."

"You took care of him yourself while he was in the sanitarium?"

"I scarcely left his side for an hour the entire time."

I looked at her sharply, but there was no trembling in her noble features. Was it the truth or a lie that I saw here? "Then you both spent your entire time in the sanitarium, excepting for your visits to your brother-in-law, in Vienna?"

"Yes, our entire time. And he really seems to be much

better." I glanced down at the fur coat again and took up my hat. She bade me good-by in her usual calm and gentle manner.

As I descended the stairs my brain was busier than ever. I could not believe that this woman was lying to me, and yet what she had told me was in direct contradiction to the information I had gathered but a few moments before.

I found the pretended messenger still sucking at his pipe, in his attitude of idle lounging. I passed him without speaking and jumped into the street car, intending to return to the police station for the telegram from Vienna. As I took the little ticket handed me by the conductor, my mind still absolutely absorbed by the problem before me, a sudden thought shot through my brain. The tramway ticket I had taken from the fur overcoat was in my own pocket. It might furnish a clew.

Ten minutes later I was in the central office of the street railway company with the question: "Here is a ticket marked Block D. 178, No. 743. Can you tell me on what date and for what part of the line this was used?"

The official in charge nodded, and went to a case in the back room, where he took a large volume out of a row of similar ones. He opened it, wrote something on a sheet of paper, and came back to me. "This ticket was used on the evening of the 4th of April, about ten o'clock, for a ride from the city out to the railway station. It was given out in wagon No. 127. You may have the names of the conductor and the driver if you wish it."

"Thank you."

I called up the nearest cab and ordered the driver to take me as quickly as possible to the police station.

While my carriage was rattling over the stone pavements, I took a deep breath and pressed my hands to my forehead. What was I to think? Had this woman really lied to me? The little tramway ticket gave evidence of the truth of what the janitor had told me. The man who wore the overcoat in which I had found the ticket had been in Budapest on the evening of the 4th of April. If all the rest of what the

janitor had told me was true, then the professor, after arranging the pretended robbery in his study, had returned to the railway station, probably to take the night train through Vienna to his sanitarium.

While I was telling the commissioner of the important discoveries I had made, two telegrams were handed me. One of them was from my chief in Vienna, giving me authority to undertake and carry through the Versegy case. The second was also from the Vienna police, and told us that on the 6th of April Hungarian bonds to the value of 40,000 gulden—some of the bonds mentioned in Professor Versegy's list—had been presented at the Anglo-Bank for negotiation, and the money paid out on them. Further researches were being made.

That same evening I boarded a train for Vienna to take up the investigation in that city. The train I had chosen was the one I believed the professor to have taken, that is, if the little tramway ticket found in the pocket of his coat had really been used by him. Before my departure I took occasion to entreat the commissioner, who now believed absolutely that the professor was guilty, not to take any steps against the man until I should tell him to do so. After long hesitation and much protest he agreed to my request. It was evidently against his own judgment that he did so, however, for he declared that hesitation was absurd in the face of all the evidence we held.

The journey from Budapest to Vienna lasted most of the night. I had about two hours left for sleep; then after a cold bath and breakfast, I went at once to the police station to take command of the researches that were being made among the banks. Copies of the lists of the missing securities had been sent to all important establishments. On the very same day, as I have already told you, the Anglo-Bank reported that some of the Hungarian bonds mentioned in the list had been negotiated to the value of 40,000 gulden. Later on an answer came from another bank, stating that on the same 6th of April, a number of securities, amounting to about 50,000 gulden, had been offered for sale, and as

the papers stood high in value at that time, the bank had purchased them without further questioning. This gave me two different places to make my inquiries as to the personality of the seller of these bonds.

But before doing so, I sent one of my colleagues to the sanitarium in Kaltenleutgeben to make inquiries about the professor there. I expected some message from him in two hours at the most.

I myself drove first to the offices of the Anglo-Bank. The building was situated in one of the busiest streets in the center of the city. I entered the broad double doors that led directly into the public office, which was divided by a long counter running across the room. On one side of it were chairs and tables for the use of the public; behind it were the desks of the bank officials and the safes containing the money to be used during the day. I stated my errand and the official to whom I spoke, seemingly already informed of the matter, asked me to wait a moment until he had announced me to the president of the bank. He returned in a moment and led me into a private office, where the president, a white-bearded gentleman of amiable manners, promised me at once every possible assistance for my work. He showed me the books with the notice of the sale of the Hungarian bonds. The numbers of the different papers were all written down; there was no doubt as to their being the ones we sought. The receipt for the money was also at hand, signed with the name "Sandor Versegy," under which was written in pencil "Hotel Imperial."

I had seen the professor's handwriting when he signed his name to the official report of our investigation in his apartment. I now believed that the signature I saw before me here was not written by his hand. And this signature looked to me as if it were written in a disguised hand; as if the writer habitually used another sort of penmanship.

"Could you give me a personal description of the man who sold these bonds?" I asked the president.

"No, I am sorry to say I couldn't. I spend most of my time here in my own office, and seldom see the outer rooms

except to pass through them. But the gentleman who bought the bonds tells me that he remembers the man quite clearly." He pressed a button and when a servant appeared, ordered him to ask Mr. von Bauernfeind to come to us. When the attendant had left the room the president continued: "The gentleman in question is the son of the well-known banker, von Bauernfeind. He is not as clever as his father, but he is fairly useful."

There was a knock at the door, and a tall young man with a pleasant, handsome face entered the room. He was about twenty-five years old, very carefully dressed, and of easy, natural demeanor. The president introduced us. "Mr. Plank would like to have a definite description of the man who sold us these Hungarian bonds on the 6th of April. You told me yesterday that you could remember him quite clearly?"

"Yes, sir." The young man turned to me. "Yes—I took the man to be a landed proprietor or something of the sort. He spoke slowly, with the soft, drawling Viennese accent one finds so often among members of the higher circles."

"And may I ask why?"

Young Bauernfeind smiled with a touch of embarrassment, and stroked his little blond mustache with a carefully tender hand. "Well—don't you know, one has a sort of a feeling—the gentleman was very sure of himself. I am pretty careful and it was a big sum, but he seemed so innocent—you couldn't possibly suspect him."

"What do you mean by saying he seemed so innocent?"

The young man looked at me in astonishment. "Why, his whole manner wouldn't let you think for a minute that there was anything wrong about it. He seemed like a man who was used to dealing with big sums. When I gave him the quotations for the papers, he said they were very low, and he was right. The stocks were way down at the time. Then he said that he had been away and had missed the right moment for selling them, so he supposed he'd have to bear the little loss. Then when I sent down to the

vaults, because there wasn't enough money in the day safe, he sat quietly in his chair and didn't seem the least excited, although the attendant stayed away a precious long time. Then, when the money came, he took it in such an easy way, as if he wasn't in the slightest hurry about it—I never was more surprised than when they told me yesterday that the securities had been stolen."

"But you haven't told me yet why you thought he was a landed proprietor?"

"Why, he—he just looked like it."

I had to smile in spite of the serious situation. "And what do they usually look like?—Or rather what did this man look like?"

The young man laughed, a good-natured, merry laugh. "Why, don't you know,—I thought he must be a stranger,—and then he gave the Hotel Imperial as his address. He was about middle height, not tall, yet you couldn't call him small, he seemed big enough——"

"Can't you remember whether he spoke with any dialect?"

"I didn't notice any," said the young man after a moment's hesitation. I felt a distinct sensation of relief rising in my heart. The description of the seller of the bonds did not fit Professor Versegy in the least. I continued my inquiry in growing excitement. "And his face? Can you remember his face?"

"Couldn't see much of his face, it was so covered up by his heavy black beard and his big spectacles. His hair was thick and black, and his cheeks were round and red,—that's all I could see."

I nodded. At last we had our clew. "And his clothes, can you remember his clothes?"

The young man's eyes sparkled with fresh interest. "Oh yes, I remember his clothes. I remember thinking to myself, if this fellow runs around much in Vienna he'll start a new fashion here. He had on a queer-looking light brown fur overcoat with a black collar, astrakhan, I think——"

My hopes fell. Here was the fatal brown overcoat

again, the overcoat from which I had taken the tramway ticket, the overcoat the janitor had described. And yet the man described to me here had certainly nothing in common with Professor Versegy. The professor was very slight, this man was described as of heavy figure; the professor was pale and almost bald; the other's face had the glow of health and his hair was black and heavy. And more important than all else, this mysterious stranger was a cold-blooded, self-controlled man, who, without the trembling of an eyelid, could go through the dangerous business of selling the bonds. I had seen enough of the professor to understand that it was quite impossible for him to act in this manner under any circumstances.

Of course it was possible that the professor might really have been guilty, and that he had turned the bonds over to some accomplice for the selling of them. But here again, what inconceivable stupidity for the accomplice, if he were such, to sign Versegy's name to the receipts, and to wear the conspicuous overcoat in the banks.

But who was it then who had sold the securities, if the professor himself were innocent?

Was it some professional thief who had robbed the safe, and who had no connection whatever with Versegy? But how could such a man come into possession of the professor's fur overcoat. The tramway ticket which I found in the pocket of this coat was proof beyond a doubt that it was really the garment belonging to the professor and not merely a similar one, which played such an important part in the case.

The information which was given me in the second bank agreed absolutely with what I had heard from Mr. von Bauernfeind. In this second establishment, also, the man who offered the securities for sale was absolutely calm, easy and jovial in manner, wore the same brown fur overcoat, chatted with the official who served him about all sorts of indifferent things, and then drove away in a cab which had been waiting for him. In this bank also he made the impression of a man of means who needed a large sum in

ready cash for some business transaction and was selling his securities for this reason. This second receipt also was signed with the name of Sandor Versegy. The address given here, however, was the Hoted Bristol.

I decided that the next move was to visit these hotels, although I was quite prepared to learn that no one of the name of Sandor Versegy had ever stopped at either place. But when I made my inquiries at the houses, my respect for the cold-blooded cleverness of this unknown criminal grew tremendously. In both hotels filed telegrams were shown me dated from Budapest on the 4th of April. In each message Sandor Versegy ordered a quiet room for the 6th of April. The robber had thus secured himself in case of an inquiry from the banks. He had not appeared, of course.

What was the next thing for me to do? Of course, I might inquire in the Budapest telegraph stations, or I might hunt up the cab which had driven the seller of the bonds to the second bank on the 6th of April. But should I succeed in getting any information at either place, the description of the stranger for whom I sought would doubtless be identical with that given me in the banks.

The next really important thing for me was the report I should receive from my colleague whom I had sent to the sanitarium in which the professor claimed to have spent four weeks or more from the 4th of April on.

I drove back to the police station and found two messages waiting for me. The first that I opened was from my colleague in Kaltenleutgeben.

"According to testimony given me by the managers of the sanitarium and attendants, it seems beyond a doubt that Professor Sandor Versegy, in company with his wife, spent the three days in question as well as the entire time from the 1st of April to the 3d of May, without any interruption whatever, in this establishment."

The passion of the chase held me in bonds. I felt I must see this thing through and bring the truth to light. And I had a feeling as if I owed the professor a reparation for my few hours of suspicion. These thoughts filled my mind so

completely that it was with half attention only that I opened the second message, dated from Budapest, glancing carelessly at the blue letters printed on the white paper.

Then my hands trembled, and I stared again and again at the words before me, words for which I could find no sense nor meaning. I pulled myself together and read the message again.

For God's sake! but how was it possible?—the paper sank from my hands—then all was over?

I stood staring out of the window into the turmoil in the street below, the scene, changing and yet ever the same, of the constant hurrying past of an endless crowd. But it all seemed so far away from me, my thoughts were struggling helplessly to find some fixed point in all this terrible confusion.

Then my eyes turned once more to the paper before me. The words written there fell like blows of a heavy hammer upon my consciousness. This was the message:

Mr. Richard Plank,
Central Police Station,
Vienna.

Please stop further investigation in Versegy case. Professor's guilt proven by me beyond a doubt. Unfortunately the criminal committed suicide immediately after his arrest. Your presence here greatly desired. Come to-night if possible. Explanations awaiting you.

Commissioner M.

I stood for some minutes looking out again into the street, thinking of this poor man who had died by his own hand this very day—just at the moment, perhaps, when I had been unearthing the proofs of his innocence. He died dishonored by a shameful suspicion, a suspicion which might indeed have driven a sick and nervous man to such a terrible step——!

But there was no time for these sad reflections. I must act and act at once. I decided to fulfill the commissioner's

wish and take the night train for Budapest, but there were things to do here in the hours which still remained to me.

It had occurred to me that the professor had spoken to me of a stepbrother, Ludwig Révai, with whom he had spent a few days on passing through Vienna. It might be well to visit this brother and see what he could tell me.

"Ludwig Révai, agent, Schwind Street 3," was the address I found in the directory. Fifteen minutes later my cab halted before a handsome house in a quiet residence street near the Schwarzenberg Park.

The janitor told me that the gentleman I sought lived in the second story, and when I rang the bell at the door marked with his name, a servant in livery opened it and a little fox terrier danced barking around me.

"Is Mr. Révai at home?"

The young valet commanded the dog to be quiet, then retired from the door with the words, "I will see; whom shall I announce?"

I gave him my card and waited outside the door. He returned in a minute or two and led me through a pretty dining room into his master's study.

When I entered, a man of about 38 years of age rose from an armchair before his desk and glanced down at the card in his hand.

"Good-morning, Mr.—Plank. You came on account of the dog, I suppose?"

I bowed, and it was possible that I made some little gesture which he took for acquiescence, for he continued to speak rapidly.

"Yes, I know the little beast is a terror. What has he done now? Has he been running out without his muzzle, or has he made an attack upon the calves of some of my respected fellow citizens? Sit down here comfortably and tell me all about it."

He pointed to a comfortable divan that stood beside his desk, and sat down himself in his armchair, turning slightly so that the light from the window fell on his back, leaving his face in half darkness.

"No, Mr. Révai," I answered. "I did not come because of your dog. My visit has another and a far more serious cause."

I paused and looked at him. The silhouette of his body stood out, broad-shouldered and massive, against the light. I could not see his features very clearly, but I felt that his eyes rested on me in calm inquiry.

"It isn't the dog, then? And may I ask what else brings you here?"

"You have a brother in Budapest, Mr. Révai?"

"In Budapest? Why, yes, of course—that is, he is my stepbrother, Professor Versegy. Is there anything the matter? I mean, is he ill again?"

He bent forward as he spoke, and there showed in his firm voice a natural anxiety for the invalid.

"Your brother has been away from his home for some time, as I suppose you know. He was in a sanitarium, and he tells me that he spent several days with you here in company with his wife."

Révai nodded. "Yes, and——"

"When your brother returned to Budapest he discovered that during his absence his safe had been opened and a fortune, in securities, as well as several pieces of jewelry, stolen from it. The professor reported the affair at once to the police and the official investigation began. During this investigation, however, by an unfortunate chance, circumstances came to light which brought a suspicion upon——"

It seemed to me as if there was a gentle knock at the door just at this moment, and I looked up. Révai did not seem to notice the noise. He sat motionless, all attention.

"Well——?" he said, as I did not continue.

"Someone knocked at the door," I replied.

He stood up with a start, walked to the door and opened it. The fox terrier crawled in with a bashful expression and rubbed against his master's feet. But the latter seemed to have slight interest for his pet just now. He caught the little animal roughly by the neck and threw it into the dining-room again. Then he closed the door and returned to his

chair. His full, round face was pale and his hands trembled slightly when they rested once more on the arm of the chair.

"Pardon the interruption," he said, "I was much interested and moved by what you were telling me. Please go on. You said that suspicion fell upon——?"

I nodded. "Yes, through a series of circumstances, unfortunate chance perhaps, your brother himself fell under suspicion."

"My brother?" Révai started up. Then he sat down again and shook his head, his expression showing anxiety and anger.

"My brother is a man of honor," he exclaimed hastily. "No matter what trouble may have come upon him, he would never do anything disgraceful. He is ill, suffers from an abnormal melancholy which makes him see everything in the darkest light."

I nodded. The professor's sad death was a terrible example of the truth of what his brother had just said, and I continued: "Then you noticed this trait in your brother while he was here? Did he ever say anything to you, anything about his own affairs, I mean, that would show you how hopeless this melancholy seemed to make him? I have more to tell you, and you will soon understand the reason for my question."

Mr. Révai sat for some few minutes looking down at the floor. His fingers grasped the carved arms of his chair, he seemed struggling with himself for a decision. Then he raised his head and began to speak, in clear tones through which a slight emotion vibrated sympathetically.

"This is an important question which I do not want to answer hastily. I should not answer it at all, perhaps. But then again I think it better if I should tell you all, particularly as I am absolutely convinced of my brother's innocence. Yes, he did speak to me often about his affairs while he was here. He had lost considerable money speculating in stocks, and his condition of health did not permit him to take up his work in the University again. His fortune was

considerably reduced and he was much worried about it. But what has all this to do with the matter now before us? This is only his private misfortune. What you tell me of is a crime."

Mr. Révai appeared a little uncertain, as if he repented having already said so much to me. In his anxiety to free his brother from every possible suspicion, he only succeeded in throwing more doubt upon the matter.

"You see my brother is ill, and very eccentric. When he was here the last time on his way home, I noticed particularly how uneasy he seemed to be—it was as if he suspected some coming misfortune—as if he felt that the future loomed black before him— And then, something that he said——"

"Indeed?"

"Yes—but then I remembered his illness and his doubts as to whether he would ever recover——"

"And may I ask what he said?"

"Nothing of importance; he said—he appeared to think that an important moment in his life was approaching—that it was impossible to see how things might turn out—— I thought, of course, he meant his illness when he spoke."

I nodded. "Probably he did."

"Yes, don't you think so? What else could he have meant?" Mr. Révai became quite excited. "But what does he himself say to all this? Has he a suspicion of anyone? Have they found any clew, I mean anything beyond the circumstances that throw this absurd suspicion on my poor brother? What has he to say about it himself?"

I hesitated and looked at him. He sat leaning forward, watching me eagerly.

"I have a message from Budapest just now which tells me that your brother has been completely crushed by the suspicion resting upon him. More than that, he is dead—dead by his own hands."

"Merciful God!" Révai pressed both hands to the heavy black hair falling over his temples and stood staring

at me, dazed. The light fell full upon his pale face, distorted in horror.

I had risen also. I felt pity for this man to whom I had brought such bad news. Pity for the terrible grief and horror that he seemed to feel.

"Yes, this is the sad truth. I do not know the details myself yet. I leave for Budapest to-night, to learn how it happened."

Révai seemed to be slowly regaining control of himself. He pushed back the hair from his forehead and paced up and down in the little room, his face still pale and drawn. When he was somewhat calmer, he stopped before me. "How terrible it is," he said. He trembled throughout his entire frame. Then, as if to excuse his emotion he continued: "You may have thought me absurdly emotional—but you must understand—— He was my stepbrother—and then it is only a few days since he was here in my house, in this very room—— Oh! how terrible it all is!"

I nodded.

"Then of course, outside of the mere human interest, another question comes up—your brother's death just at this moment places his family in a very painful position. His suicide will naturally appear like a proof of the truth of the suspicion which rested upon him. People will say that he died to escape discovery, punishment, and dishonor. And unless we succeed in discovering the real thief, there will be a stain upon his name——"

"The real thief?" Mr. Révai caught up my card and looked at it with drawn brows, his hand trembling slightly. Then he looked up, but without raising his eyes sufficiently to let them meet mine. He seemed interested in something on my waistcoat as he asked: "And you, you yourself, Mr. Plank, you do not believe that my brother—what shall I say—that Sandor has any connection with this crime?"

"No. I have reason to believe that the thief is quite another person. And this is the cause of my visit to you."

Mr. Révai rested his left arm on his desk. For a second

only his eye met mine, and then it fell again to the level of my vest. "Visit to *me*? How can *I* help you?"

"We have discovered traces here in Vienna of the man who is apparently the robber. We know sufficient to take for granted that the thief was well acquainted with the habits of your brother and that he must have met him here in Vienna. The question I have to ask of you is this: Can you tell me of anyone with whom your brother had intercourse during his first visit here?"

Révai shrugged his shoulders thoughtfully. "My brother stopped here with me, as you know already. I have more room than I need, as I am a bachelor,—I could not refuse his wish to be with me. I put one of my rooms at the disposal of himself and his wife, but I know very little of how he passed his time here. During those days I was exceptionally busy and could see my guests only at mealtime or when we went out together in the evening. I know that he saw several friends whom he had known in former years,—my sister-in-law will be able to tell you who they were."

Then there was a pause before I asked: "Will you go to Budapest?"

He rose and walked to the side of the room, stopping before a bookcase. From a shelf he took a railway guide and returned to me.

"I don't know yet. What train could I get?" He took the book in his hand and it fell open at the very page he sought. "Here it is——"

"That's a piece of luck," I exclaimed. "It's such a bother to find any particular place in these books."

Révai looked up with a start. Then he smiled. "Good luck? Not quite that. My poor brother was using the book at just this page before he left for home—I don't know yet whether I will be able to get away." He laid the book down open on his desk. "Is there anything else I can do for you, Mr. Plank?" His voice took on a sudden coolness. "If there is anything else that I can do to help you in your researches,—please call upon me."

"Thank you, you are very kind." I bowed and turned to go.

Mr. Révai himself accompanied me to the door of the dining-room, where I was met by the valet and the terrier, who escorted me to the door of the apartment. I walked downstairs slowly. There was something that seemed to hold me back. A secret voice whispered to me that here, in this quiet home of luxurious ease, something might be found,—something which would reveal the truth of the Versegy case.

The rain fell heavily, as the express from Vienna to Budapest roared through the blackness of the night. The drops beat against the window of my compartment in broken lines that gathered into little dots, and broke again and gathered again; all rolling downward to unite at the bottom of the pane. Thus my thoughts beat against the walls of my brain, gathering together in new combinations, then breaking up and scattering into hopeless chaos until finally a rhythm became noticeable, a certain direction into which all the scattered units grew together at last. I seemed to see light in the far distance, dim but steady, a light to which I could find my way if only I could discover the hidden motive which would make it all clear.

It was about eight o'clock in the morning when I met the commissioner in Budapest. I found him in a mood in which his natural triumph over the justification of his own conclusions was mingled with a sincere sorrow for the unfortunate death of the professor. From him I learned how the catastrophe had come about.

The morning after my departure the man who had been set to watch the house of the professor came hurriedly to the police station with the news that the professor's wife—who had taken him for a city messenger—had called him over to the house and told him that he was to come in half an hour to fetch a valise and take it to the railway station. She told him that the professor himself would accompany him, as he was to take the train for Vienna. The commissioner was greatly excited over the thought that his captive,

as he considered him, was planning an escape. He felt it was necessary to act at once or it would be too late.

He himself, accompanied by two gendarmes in plain clothes, hurried at once to the professor's apartment. He left one of his attendants in the hall below, the other accompanied him upstairs. The professor opened the door himself, as the servants of the household had not yet returned. He seemed confused and alarmed at sight of the commissioner, and, while he asked the gentlemen to enter the hall, it was plain to be seen that he was very uneasy.

The commissioner, in spite of an attempted protest on the part of the professor, walked past him into the study. There he saw a half-packed valise, and several articles of clothing lying about on chairs.

"You are going away, professor? That is rather odd——"

The professor looked at the commissioner angrily. "Yes, I'm going away. What business is that of yours?"

The commissioner smiled. "More than you think."

Now the professor was angry in earnest. "It is no business at all of yours—and I wish an explanation of your behavior towards me. You push your way into my house at this hour of the morning—and then your manner yesterday——"

The other interrupted. "When are you going away? And why?"

"As I said before, that is no business of yours." The professor, who had been so worried and crushed the day before, now showed an unexpected energy.

"It *is* my business. You are going to Vienna——!"

The professor's face trembled. Then he tried to smile. "Well, as you know it, why do you bother me with questions? If you have anything else to say, say it quickly—I am in a hurry." He turned to his trunk and tossed the things hurriedly into it. "I am in a hurry, as I said; the messenger will be here for this bag in a moment."

The commissioner came closer. "Spare yourself the trouble, professor, the messenger will *not* be here." The professor looked up with a start, and the commissioner

walked to the window, pulled the curtain to one side, and pointed down at the street. "Look out here yourself; he is no longer there. He was *my* messenger, sir."

"You—you have set a watch upon me." The professor was pale and trembling, his features distorted by fright, as he asked the question. "How dare you? What do you want of me? How dare you put a watch upon me?" His fingers moved tremblingly back and forth over his sunken temples and his thin beard.

"I want to know what takes you to Vienna?"

The professor stood convulsed by his inward struggle, his lips trembling, his whole body shaking. He tried to speak once or twice, but could not. Finally he stammered, "I owe you no accounting."

The commissioner raised his eyebrows. "As you like. But then I shall be obliged to forbid your departure."

"What—what is that you say?" The man's voice was hoarse. He stared at the commissioner as if he could not understand the words he had heard. "You will not let me go away? You will keep me here——?"

"I must do my duty, however hard it may be; and my duty, after all the evidence we have against you, is to arrest you."

"To arrest me?—evidence against me?—— What evidence is there against me? Arrest me?"

He staggered back as if struck by a heavy blow, and clutched for support at the chair that stood by his desk.

There was a moment's deep silence in the room. Then the professor sank down suddenly in the chair, covered his face with his hands, and sobbed aloud. All his new-found energy had vanished into nothing.

The commissioner looked at his assistant with a meaning glance. They had come just in time, he thought; an hour later and the bird would have flown.

A moment or two passed in silence. Then the commissioner asked: "Are you ready, professor?"

The professor had controlled himself somewhat by this time. Sobs still shook his frame, but his hands brushed his

face tremblingly as if to wipe away the signs of his emotion. "My wife will return at any moment," he said in a low voice. Then a sob shook him again.

"Couldn't you write a message for her?" asked the commissioner.

The professor shook his head. Mechanically, in the manner of one accustomed to follow the promptings of a will stronger than his own, he drew a key from his pocket and opened a drawer in his desk. With trembling fingers he pulled a sheet of writing paper from the chaos within the drawer, then he gave a start and stared as if petrified into the mass of papers before him. He made an impulsive movement to close the drawer, but the wood was stubborn, or it may have been caught somewhere. The commissioner was already at his back and reaching over, past the other's shoulder, he saw, lying there among the papers and manuscripts—a broken file.

An exclamation burst from the commissioner's lips as he raised the little instrument from its resting place. It was a three-cornered tool, the point broken off in a queer diagonal piece. "And what have you to say now, professor?"

The professor stared at the little tool without speaking. It was evident that he understood the full meaning of this discovery for him. He put his hand to his forehead, and his eyes wandered aimlessly about the room. His lips moved as if gasping for breath, he tried to speak but could not. A dry choking sob rattled down deep in his throat.

The commissioner, who thought it time to bring the affair to a close, continued to speak. "We found the broken piece of a file lying beside the safe. There is no doubt whatever that this is the instrument to which the broken piece belongs. No further denial is possible in such a case." He turned to his assistant: "Here, officer, arrest——"

The professor jumped to his feet so hastily that he knocked over the chair upon which he had been seated. He looked wildly about as if seeking for aid. It was very quiet in the room. There was nothing to be heard but the echo of the noise made by the chair as it fell, and the slight

rattling of the keys hanging from the desk drawer. "I am innocent——"

The commissioner threw back his head scornfully, and put the file carefully in his pocket. "It will not be easy for you to prove that——"

"I—I—Ilka!——"

He called the name in helpless despair.

"Come on now—here, officer——"

But the frail little man tore himself from the hands stretched out to seize him, and ran through the drawing-room, through the corridor, out to the stairs. Was it an attempt at flight? Or was it a wild search for his wife—a despairing wish to be near her—— But out there on the stairs he found the other gendarme, standing with arms outstretched to cut off his path. And from behind him, from his apartment, the despairing man heard the hasty steps of the others following him.

Then it was that he seemed to have lost his head completely. The men saw him clutch at the railing of the stairs. Before any of them could reach him he threw himself over.

A scream shrilled through the high hall—a heavy thud was heard from below——

Excited cries and the rush of many feet down the stairs filled the house with noise. Doors were opened hastily, excited questions heard, shouts and turmoil. When the three men reached the lower hall, the janitor was already kneeling over the corpse. They carried it upstairs and laid it on the sofa.

A few moments later the professor's wife came in. She had seen the excitement in the hall below and along the stairway. From every door heads looked out at her, timidly and with curiosity, and a little crowd was gathered before the door of her own apartment. They stepped back with frightened haste, to make way for her as she entered the apartment in vague alarm. Then she saw and heard what had happened.

The first burst of her grief was beyond all control. She threw herself over the body in frank despair.

The men stood about, not knowing what to do. Then one after the other crept from the apartment, leaving the two alone: the dead man and the woman who knelt beside him, clasping his body in her arms,

This was the story the commissioner told me, a story which moved him visibly. He added that he had returned to the apartment that same afternoon, and found the wife much calmer. Her grief seemed frozen into stern energy. The commissioner told her that of course all criminal proceedings would be stopped, but that she must not expect to receive any of the insurance money. He showed her the two pieces of the file, fitting each other exactly. She did not speak until he had finished, then she said, in a voice vibrating with the depth of her woe: "My poor husband died innocent. I shall not rest until I have proved it." I listened attentively to the commissioner's story, trying to piece together these new events with what I had learned in Vienna. When he had finished his narrative I said: "And you really believe it to be a pretended robbery arranged by Professor Versegy?"

The commissioner's nerves were still rasped by the occurrences of the day before, and he answered angrily: "How can I doubt it? Look at this broken file. And if he wasn't guilty why did he kill himself? He was about to leave the city when I arrested him,—he was trying to run away——"

"Are you so sure of that?"

"Of course—— What else took him to Vienna?"

"That was for us to find out. I feel quite certain that we should have discovered all we still need to know quite easily if we had let the man go away under careful watch. This arrest was an error, and I fear that we——"

The commissioner took a cigarette from his case and twirled it excitedly in his fingers. "Pardon me, Mr. Plank, but I don't think we understand each other at all," he cut in. "What is it that you still want to know?"

"I want to know who it was that committed the robbery in the professor's apartment. I am firmly convinced that

the professor had as little to do with the affair as you or I."

The commissioner stopped right in front of me, looked at me as if he didn't understand my words, and then shook his head violently. "Nonsense!" he exclaimed. "Pardon me, but I meant only that what you say there is quite impossible. It is unbelievable, in face of all we have discovered and proven."

I shrugged my shoulders. "It is not yet quite clear, perhaps, but there is no nonsense about it. You will agree with me when you have heard what I have to tell."

And I told him of my visits to the banks of Vienna, of the message sent me by my colleague in the sanitarium, and of my conversation with Mr. Révai, the dead man's stepbrother. The more I talked, the more uneasy grew the commissioner. The positive statements that Professor Versegy had not left the sanitarium on the days in question seemed to shake his conviction. But he did not say anything, listening with tight-closed lips to my story. When I had finished he was serious and apparently depressed. He walked up and down the room, staring out into space. Finally he asked: "And you intend to follow up this case?"

I arose from my chair. "I do. And I believe that I can bring the truth to light."

The commissioner could scarcely control his irritation. "Very well, Mr. Plank, do what you like about it. But I repeat that I have not changed my opinion. It was a pretended robbery, and the affair is closed with the unfortunate death of the man who arranged it."

When I left the commissioner after this conversation, it was clear to me that I could no longer depend upon any assistance from the Budapest police on the case, and that I would have to go on in my work quite alone. What the commissioner had told me of the professor's intention to go to Vienna gave me a hint as to my next line of inquiry. To follow this up it was necessary that I should speak to Mrs. Versegy, as she alone could tell me what I must know.

I found her quiet and calm. Only her reddened eyes and the firm set of her lips showed what she was suffering. She held out her hand to me and asked: "Do you come from the commissioner?"

"No, my visit to you now is quite independent. I do not know whether you have already been told of my part in this investigation. I was in Vienna yesterday, and what I learned there gave me the conviction that your husband had nothing whatever to do with the robbery."

Her eyes shone. "I don't understand how it was possible ever to believe anything else."

"There was evidence against him——"

"But I will not rest until I have cleared his name from every stain. Did you read yesterday's evening papers? Did you see the cruel, malicious hints as to the connection between his death and this robbery?" Her grief and anger overcame her and she sobbed aloud. Then she drew herself up again, wiped away her tears, and shook her head energetically.

"They drove him to his death with their suspicions. This poor, sick man, the gentlest, kindest man that ever lived." There was a pause as she looked past me into distance.

Then I spoke again. "I fear that we need expect nothing more from the police of this city. But I do not agree with them in this case at all. I believe I have found a clew to the true criminal,—may I ask you to help me in my work by answering a few questions?"

She nodded and sat upright in her chair, waiting for me to speak. The light fell full upon her face; I could see every change in it.

"Had your husband any enemies—or any particular enemy that you know of?"

"No. My husband was the most peaceable man you could imagine."

"What were the relations between your husband and his stepbrother, Mr. Révai?"

A sudden flush swept over her face, and when she spoke

there was a slight trembling in her voice. "They have been very good friends for a year or more. While we were in Vienna, just recently, they appeared very glad to see each other."

"And before that?"

She hesitated.

"It is very necessary for me to know this."

"They avoided each other for many years before that."

"Do you know why?"

A few seconds passed before she answered. Then she said hastily: "It was—because of me. My husband married very late in life, we have been married only five years. While we were engaged, his brother Lajos came to visit him for several weeks. It was then I made his acquaintance. He seemed to misunderstand my friendliness towards him—and—I was obliged to request him to respect me as the promised bride of his brother. There were some words between him and Sandor—for this same cause—and it brought about the enmity between them, which lasted until a little over a year ago."

"How did they become friends again?"

"My husband made the first advances. He heard that his brother had engaged himself beyond his means in some building operation and he helped him out of the trouble. My brother-in-law soon returned the money that was lent him and made a formal apology to my husband and myself for his behavior five years before. And when we wrote to him that we were passing through Vienna, he asked us to stop with him. We could not very well refuse it——"

She stopped and I nodded as if in acquiescence. Before my mental vision I saw Révai, sitting beside his desk, his eyes not raised to mine as he said: "My brother stopped with me here—I have a large apartment—I could not refuse his request——"

It was only a trifle, but an important trifle. To whose wish had the visit in Vienna been due? I continued my inquiries. "Did your husband tell you why he was going to Vienna just now?"

"He was in a strange mood those days," she said. "I couldn't understand him at all. Usually he was frankness itself towards me, but now it seemed as though he was trying to hide something from me. He said nothing to me about his reasons for going, and he did not wish me to go with him. I imagined he might be going on a personal errand to the insurance company, the central office of which is in Vienna. And he had spoken to me of wishing to visit his brother."

I stood up. "That is all that I need. I am very grateful to you."

She rose also. "Have you any definite suspicion, any chance of finding the criminal?" Her reddened eyes rested with dumb entreaty on mine.

I answered her with another question: "When will the funeral be held?"

Her eyes filled with tears. "To-morrow," she whispered.

I took her hand and pressed it warmly. "I can promise you one thing, your husband shall be laid to rest with his honor free from stain. In that very hour that the earth falls above his coffin, I hope to have the true criminal under lock and key."

There was nothing more for me to do in Budapest. I ordered a wreath to be sent to the professor's house the following day, and then took the noon train for Vienna. I spent the entire time of the ride at a little corner table in the smoking compartment of the dining car, working at my problem with the help of black coffee and strong cigarettes. Surer and more sure, clearer and more clear, the various links of the chain stood out before me; and when twilight fell, and the lights were lit in the train, I knew I had found *that* for which I was seeking.

In Vienna, before I retired for the night, I wrote a note to Mr. Ludwig Révai, asking him if I might call upon him the following morning at ten o'clock in company with a colleague who was also engaged in the Versegy robbery case. We wished to ask him for certain information. I told him that the police in Budapest had ceased their in-

vestigations altogether, since they were firmly convinced that the professor had been concerned in the robbery himself.

The next morning, promptly at ten o'clock, my companion and myself met before the house in Schwind Street. We mounted the stairs, and when we had rung the bell of the apartment we heard the barking of the dog, and were admitted by the valet whom I had seen yesterday. He told us that his master was expecting us, led us through the dining-room and knocked at the door of the study, with the words: "The gentlemen are here, sir."

Révai's voice answered from within: "Ask them to come in."

He rose from the chair before his desk as we entered, and greeted us with a polite bow. Then he looked about with amused helplessness at a confusion of plans, blue-prints, and books scattered about on all the chairs and sofas. "Please excuse this disorder here; you see I am in the midst of work. But I think I can find a place for you." He pushed the papers from two armchairs and offered them to us with a gesture.

We sat down, and again I noticed how cleverly Révai had arranged his chair so that the light fell upon his back and left his face in shadow, while ours could be plainly seen.

Then I began to speak. "I have already written you the reason of our coming, Mr. Révai. You were so kind when I was here last and promised me your assistance in case we should need more information in this unfortunate affair of your brother——"

He nodded in affirmation. "Certainly, I am quite at your disposal for whatever I can do. As you see, I am very busy just at present, so extremely busy that it will not be possible for me to go to Budapest to attend the funeral. I have written to my sister-in-law telling her that I could not be there. But for you, in a case of this kind—to save my poor brother's name—ask all you wish."

"Thank you. You may perhaps know that the Budapest

police believe your brother guilty and that they have stopped all further action on the case."

Révai nodded lightly. "Yes, you wrote me that—and I must say that to-day—to-day, when I've had time to think over all these terrible things more calmly——" He shook his head, then laid his hand on my arm. "My poor brother was ill, very ill—might he not have committed a deed like this—almost without knowing it—under the influence of his nervous disorder?"

"Then you now believe him guilty, Mr. Révai?" The hand on my arm trembled. I could see that the man was trying to control the shaking of his fingers and the quiver in his voice. "What am I to think? It is all so confused—there is so much evidence for such a belief—but you must see how terrible it is for me to confess even this much?"

"I do, Mr. Révai, and that is why we come to you to-day, my colleague and myself—I have proof positive that your brother is innocent."

"Proof? That my brother——" His voice was strangely high.

"Yes, I'll tell you about them in a moment. I've made a sort of mental picture of how the crime may have been committed, and I fancy it's rather near the truth. But before I close the case, I want to ask you a few questions—you must know more about the intimate details——"

His hand drew back from my arm. But he endeavored to make what had been an involuntary movement seem like a voluntary one. He brushed back the hair from his forehead, and said: "I don't know what good my opinion can do. I really knew very little of my brother's affairs—but, pardon me, may I not offer you a cigar? You don't smoke? But you don't mind if I do, do you?"

The light of the match flared up and the little glowing circle from the burning cigar shone over the face of Mr. Révai for a few seconds. It was a very pale face and the lips were colorless, but it wore an expression of cold-blooded assurance. Then I knew, with absolute certainty, that behind this man's forehead was hidden the secret of the crime.

But I knew also that this man was ready to fight me at every turn. I took from my pocket the papers from which I had made my notes in the train, and looked down at them.

"The first time I called here I told you that it was important for me to find the person or persons with whom your brother had had communication during his visit to Vienna. For I believe that this person or these persons would be found to have some connection with the crime. Let us say that there was some man among them whom the professor had not seen for a long time, a good friend of earlier years, a relative perhaps. Now let us assume this man to be in financial straits at the time. Worried with the burden of it, he learns from the professor that a large fortune in cash and negotiable securities has been left in the closed and unoccupied apartment in Budapest. If I remember rightly it was you yourself who told me that the professor was very frank in talking about his own affairs."

I felt Révai's eyes look at me with a sudden flash. "I don't remember saying anything of the kind," he said.

"Didn't you? Then I must have made a mistake—but that doesn't matter. We were only talking about possibilities anyway. Let us assume, therefore, that he had told this interesting fact, say to you, for instance."

"To *me?*" Révai's voice sought to hold a tone of harmless astonishment, but without success. Something else trembled through his question, something that he wished to conceal.

"Why, yes, to you,—or to anyone else, let us say to the robber who took the money eventually. That's the best way for us to make a mental picture of what happened. We know positively that the robbery was committed on the 4th of April, two days after the professor had left Vienna. The robber arrived in Budapest in the afternoon, entered the apartment during the early twilight hours, opened the safe and took the money, then left the house again before ten o'clock, and took the night train to Vienna. Before his departure from Budapest he telegraphed to two large hotels in Vienna, ordering a room for Sandor Versegy. The

janitor in the professor's house saw the robber pass in and out, and took him to be the professor—because he wore the professor's fur overcoat. The police in Budapest supposed the professor guilty because the apartment and the safe were both opened with the keys which belonged to them; because there were remains of the particular sort of cigarettes smoked by the professor found scattered near the safe; and finally, because the other portion of a broken file, found also near the safe, was discovered hidden in the drawer of his desk."

"Did they find all these things?" asked Ludwig Révai.

"They did. But in my opinion just these very things prove the professor's innocence."

Révai stared at me as if he did not understand what I was saying. "Prove his innocence? I really cannot understand—please express yourself more clearly——"

"Why, yes. Not even when a criminal has lost his head completely, is he likely to leave behind him such a number of betraying traces. The very fact that these traces were present in this case proves to me—something quite different."

Révai sat leaning forward, holding firmly to the arms of his chair. I looked through my notes as if searching for something. Then I stood up and walked around his chair. "May I go to the window?—the light is so poor here. There, that's much better."

He started as I approached him, but I walked past him to the window and read my notes. When I raised my eyes from the paper I could see his face in the full light. He was very pale and his eyes wandered uneasily from one to the other of us. He did not seem to like being between us in this manner.

I continued to speak as casually as before. "You see all this heaping up of clews pointing to the professor's guilt looks to me as if the man who really did commit the robbery wished to throw suspicion upon your brother. Don't you think so?"

Révai shrugged his shoulders. "You know more about

these things than I. I can't imagine why any man should want to cast suspicion on my poor brother——"

"There are reasons enough. Suppose, for instance, the robber wished to secure time for escape. What better could he do than to throw suspicion on someone else? And then there may have been a personal reason. There is one of two causes for nearly every crime: Hate or Love. The professor has a beautiful wife. I understand that you yourself took a deep interest in the lady at one time, and that this may have been the cause for the well-known enmity of years between yourself and your brother. Am I wrong?"

"Mr. Plank——" Révai was deadly pale and tossed his head with an angry gesture. Then he pulled himself together, threw the rest of his cigar into the ash tray, as he said calmly: "I do not understand why I should discuss my private affairs with you."

"Your private affairs? Oh, yes—but I was speaking of a possible case only, you know. Might it not be that the robber hated the professor or loved his wife? Or both, perhaps? This would furnish quite sufficient reason for him to wish to blacken the—your brother's name—motive enough for the crime. But there is one link still missing in our 'chain of evidence.' How did the robber come into possession of Professor Versegy's overcoat, and of his keys? For this robber went to Budapest in the fur overcoat and opened the apartment door and the safe with the keys that belonged to them."

I paused and looked at Révai in calm inquiry. His fingers drummed nervously on the table, then he pulled some of the papers nearer with an impatient gesture. "I am up to my neck in work, Mr. Plank. I am no detective, and I would very much prefer that you follow up your investigations alone until you really need my help."

"I need it now. I want to ask your opinion in a very important matter."

He continued to stare at the plans before him with drawn brows and firm-set lips. As he did not answer I con-

tinued to speak. "You see, Mr. Révai, my theory for the solution of this last problem is so simple that any child could follow it. I believe your brother left his overcoat and his keys with the robber in Vienna of his own free will, in some place where he thought them perfectly safe.

The paper rattled in his hands, his lips were blue.

"It's all so easy if you look at it that way. Your brother brought his fur coat with him, although the season was late, because he thought he might need it for the long journey from Budapest to Vienna. Once here, it was unnecessary to take such a heavy garment with him for the short trip to the sanitarium. It would be quite natural for him to leave it,—here with you, let us say, in the room you had given him."

"Here? In my room?" Révai sprang up. His fists were clenched, he looked at me as if gathering himself together for a spring. "It's merely a possibility. I am trying to work out the problem, you know. It makes it easy to understand if I specialize on some one instance."

Révai looked from my companion to myself, as if trying to calculate the chances of escape. Then he fell back in his chair with a short laugh, and touched the electric bell on his desk.

"A cab at once, Franz," he commanded when the servant appeared. Then he turned to us: "Very sorry, gentlemen, but I must leave you now. I have an appointment and am already late for it."

"One more question, Mr. Révai——"

He rose, and shook the ashes from his sleeve. "Sorry, but I've listened to your—problems, long enough—quite long enough."

I glanced at my colleague. He had already risen from his chair and stood near the door. I put my papers back into my pocket, freeing my hands.

"But this question has nothing to do with any problem. It concerns plain facts. I want to know whether your brother left his fur overcoat and a yellow handbag, con-

taining the keys of his apartment in Budapest, here with you, while he was at the sanitarium?"

"Sir!" The man hurled himself at me with a roar like that of a wild animal. His hands were at my throat, his hot breath in my face, and I was already staggering under the weight of his massive figure when my colleague came to my assistance. Between us we managed to overcome him in spite of his struggles, and a few moments later he lay bound and helpless in his armchair.

There was a knock at the door and the valet entered. "The cab is there," he said; then halted and stared at us in astonishment.

I showed him my badge of office and asked his name. "Do you remember Professor Versegy's visit in the beginning of last month? Did he leave anything here when he went to the sanitarium?"

"Yes, sir; he left a fur overcoat and several other things —they were locked in the cupboard."

"Who had the key to the cupboard?"

"I think the professor took it with him."

"Show me the cupboard." A very slight investigation showed me that the lock had been forced open and then put in order again. When I returned to Révai, I said: "I have found what I was looking for. I arrest you in the name of the law."

In a few moments more we were on our way to the police station in the cab.

The afternoon of the same day we made a thorough search in the apartment of Mr. Ludwig Révai. The man was a clever criminal but not quite clever enough. There was nothing to be found in his desk but the receipts for several old debts which had all been paid within the last few weeks, to the amount of more than 20,000 gulden. But, finally, after long seeking, we discovered the remainder of the missing securities, hidden between the paper and the wooden back frame of an old engraving. And a little later we unearthed a heavy pair of spectacles and, at the bottom of a jar of tobacco, the missing jewels belonging to Mrs.

Versegy. This closed the case, and gave us all the proofs we needed. When Révai had been dressed in the false beard and confronted with the bank officials who bought the bonds from him, he was identified absolutely. He refused to make any statement for several days. Then finally he made a full confession. Money troubles led him to commit the robbery, and his passion for his sister-in-law, fanned afresh by her visit to him, awoke his old hatred for his brother, and furnished the motive for his further actions. He had set the scene very cleverly to throw the suspicion on his brother which drove the unfortunate man to his death. . . .

I kept my word. Professor Versegy was carried to his grave with his honor clear of every stain. His wife received what portion of her property could be returned to her, and the insurance company made up what was still missing. She writes to me occasionally, telling me of her welfare and assuring me of her eternal gratitude. I made a friend of her, to compensate for the two enemies my work on the case made me: Ludwig Révai, who was sentenced to many years' imprisonment; and the police commissioner in Budapest. Possibly this young gentleman may have received a reprimand from his superiors—anyway, I can see that he avoids meeting me whenever he can.

August Groner

The Story in the Notebook

I

A QUIET winter evening had sunk down upon the great city. The clock on the clumsy church steeple of the factory district had not yet struck eight, when the side door of one of the large buildings opened, and a man came out into the quiet street.

It was Ludwig Amster, one of the workingmen in the factory, who was now starting on his homeward way. It was not a pleasant road, this street along the edge of the city. The town showed itself from its most disagreeable side here, with malodorous factories, rickety tenements, untidy open stretches, and dumping grounds that were disagreeable both to the eye and nostril.

Even by day the street that Amster takes is empty. Now by night it is absolutely quiet and dark, as dark as the thoughts of the solitary man. He walks along brooding over his troubles. Scarce an hour hence he has been discharged from the factory because of his refusal to submit to the injustice of his foreman.

The yellow light of the few lanterns shows nothing but high board walls and snowdrifts, stone heaps, and now and then the remains of a neglected garden. Here and there a stunted tree or a wild shrub bends its twigs under the white burden which the winter has laid upon them. Ludwig Amster, who has walked this street for several years, knows his path so well that he could take it blindfolded. The darkness does not worry him, but he walks somewhat more slowly than usual, for he knows that under the thin covering of fresh-fallen snow there lies the ice of the night before. He walks carefully, watching for the slippery places.

He had been walking about half an hour perhaps, when he came to a cross street. Here he noticed the tracks of a wagon, the trace still quite fresh; the slowly falling flakes did not yet cover it. The tracks lead out toward the north, on to the hilly open fields.

Amster is somewhat astonished. It is so seldom that a carriage drives past here, and these narrow wheel tracks could only have been made by an equipage of that character. The heavy trucks which pass these roads occasionally have much wider wheels. But Amster was to find still more to astonish him.

In one corner near the cross roads stands a solitary lamp-post. The light of the lamp falls sharply on the snow, on the wagon tracks, and—on something else besides.

Amster halts, bends down to look at it, and shakes his head as if in doubt.

A number of small pieces of glass gleam up at him, and between them, like tiny roses, red drops of blood shine on the white snow. All this is a few steps to one side of the wagon tracks.

"What could have happened here? Here, in this weird spot where a cry for help could not be heard—where there would be no one to give help?"

So Amster asked himself, but his discovery gave him no answer. His curiosity was aroused, however, and he wished to know more. He followed up the tracks and saw that the drops of blood led further on, to where there was no more glass. The drops could still be seen for a yard further, reaching out almost to the board fence that edged the walk. Through the broken planks of this fence the rough twigs of a thorn-bush stretched their brown fingers. On the upper side of the few scattered leaves there is snow, and blood.

Amster's wide, serious eyes soon find something else. Beside the bush there lies a tiny package. He lifts it up. It is a small, light, square package wrapped in ordinary brown paper. Where the paper comes together it is fastened by two little lumps of black bread which are still moist. He

turns the package over and shakes his head again. On the outside is written in pencil, with uncertain letters as if scribbled in great haste: "For the nearest police station."

The words look like a cry for help frozen on to the ugly paper. Amster shivers; he has a feeling that this is a matter of life and death.

The wagon tracks on this lonely street, the broken pieces of glass and the drops of blood,—which show that some occupant of the carriage had broken through the windows, either in the hope of escape, or to throw out the package which would bring assistance;—all these facts group themselves together in the brain of the intelligent workingman, to form some terrible tragedy where his assistance, if given at once, might be of great use. He has a warm heart besides, a heart that reaches out to this unknown who is in distress, and who threw out the call for help which has fallen into his hands.

He waits no longer to ponder out the matter, but starts off at a run for the nearest police station. He rushes into the room and tells breathlessly of what he has found.

They take him into the next room, the office of the commissioner for the day. The official in charge, a young man who had been in earnest conversation with a small frail-looking elderly man, turns to Amster with a question as to what brings him there.

"I found this package in the snow."

"Let me see it."

Amster lays it on the table. The elderly man looks at it, and as the commissioner is about to open it, he hands him a paper-knife with the words: "You had better *cut* it open, sir."

"Why?"

"It is sometimes good not to injure the seals that have fastened a package."

"Just as you say, Müller," said the young commissioner, smiling. He is still very young to have such a position, but his name and family connections have made it possible for him to obtain so responsible a place so soon. Kurt Von

Mayringen is a very good-looking young man and has a most charming smile, even when he is told how to do a thing by one of his subordinates. But Müller is not an ordinary subordinate. He is one of the best known and most expert detectives on the force, and the handsome young commissioner knows that anything such an experienced man may say to him can only aid him in learning his business. He takes the knife, therefore, and cuts open the paper, taking out a tiny little notebook, on the outer side of which a handsome monogram gleams up at him in golden letters.

"A woman has made this package," said Müller, who has been looking at the covering very carefully; "and this woman is blonde."

The other two look at him in astonishment. He shows them a single blond hair which had been in one of the bread seals.

"*How I was murdered.*" These are the words that Commissioner Mayringen read aloud, after he had hastily turned the first few pages of the notebook, and had come to a place where the writing was heavily underscored.

The commissioner and Amster are much astonished at these words. The detective still gazes quietly at the seals of the wrapping.

"This heading reads like insanity," said the commissioner. Müller shrugs his shoulders, then turns to Amster. "Where did you find the package?"

"In the Garden Street."

"When?"

"About twenty minutes ago."

"Tell us all about it."

Amster gives a short, lucid report of what he had seen. His intelligent face, the directness of his words, show that he has observation and the power of describing what he has observed. His honest eyes awaken confidence.

"Where could they have been taking the woman?" asked the detective, more to himself than to the others.

The commissioner searches hastily through the notebook for a signature, but without success. "Why do you think

it is a woman? This writing looks more like a man's hand to me. The letters are so heavy and——"

"That is only because they are written with a broad pen," interrupted Müller, showing him the writing on the package. "Here is the same hand, but it is written with a fine, hard pencil, and you can see distinctly that this is a woman's handwriting. And besides, the skin on a man's thumb does not show the fine markings that you can see here on these bits of bread that have been used for seals."

The commissioner rose from his seat. "You may be right, Müller. We will take for granted, then, that there is a woman in trouble. It remains to be seen whether she is insane or not."

"Yes, that remains to be seen," said Müller dryly, as he reached for his overcoat.

"You are going before you read what is in the book?" asked Commissioner Von Mayringen.

Müller nodded. "I want to see the wagon tracks before they are lost. It may help me to discover something else. You can read the book and make any arrangements you find necessary after that." Müller was already wrapped in his overcoat. "Is it snowing already?" He turned to Amster.

"Some flakes were falling as I came here."

"All right. Come with me and show me the way." Müller nodded carelessly to his superior officer, his mind evidently already engrossed by the new and interesting case, and hurried out with Amster. The commissioner was quite satisfied with the state of affairs. He knew the case was in safe hands. He seated himself at his desk again and began to read the little book which had come into his hands so strangely. His eyes ran more and more rapidly over the closely written pages, and his interest grew and grew.

When, half an hour later, he had finished the reading, he paced restlessly up and down the room, trying to bring order into the chaos of thoughts that rushed through his brain. And one thought came again and again, a thought which would not be gainsaid in spite of many improb-

abilities and many strange things of which the book was full, in spite also of the varying, uncertain handwriting and style of the message,—this one thought was: "This woman is *not* insane."

While the young official was pondering over the problem, Müller entered as quietly as usual, put his hat and cane in their places and shook the snow off his clothing. He was evidently pleased about something. Kurt Von Mayringen did not notice his entrance. He was again at the desk with the open book before him, staring at the mysterious words, "*How I was murdered.*"

"It is a woman. A lady of position. And if she is mad, then her madness certainly has method." Müller said these words in his usual quiet way, almost indifferently. The young commissioner started up and snatched for the fine white handkerchief which the detective handed him. A strong sweet perfume filled the room. "It is hers," he murmured.

"It is hers," said Müller. "At least we can take that much for granted, for the handkerchief bears the same monogram, A. L., which is in the notebook."

Commissioner Von Mayringen rose from his chair in evident excitement—"Well?" he asked.

It was a short question, but full of meaning, and one could see that he was waiting in great excitement for the answer. Müller reported what he had discovered. The commissioner thought it little enough, and shrugged his shoulders impatiently when the other had finished.

Müller noticed his chief's dissatisfaction and smiled at it. He himself was quite content with what he had found.

"Is that all?" murmured the commissioner, as if disappointed.

"That is all," repeated the detective calmly, and added: "That is a good deal. We have here a closely written notebook, the contents of which, as I can see by your excitement, are evidently important. We have also a handkerchief with an unusual perfume on it. I repeat that is quite considerable. Besides this, we have the seals and we know several

other things. I believe that we can save this lady, or if it be too late, we can avenge her at least."

The commissioner looked at Müller in surprise. "We are in a city of more than a million inhabitants," he said, almost timidly.

"I have hunted criminals in two hemispheres, and I have found them," said Müller simply. The young commissioner smiled and held out his hand. "Ah, yes, you—Müller—I keep forgetting the great things you have done. You are so quiet about it."

"What I have done is only what anyone could do who had that particular faculty. I do only what is in human power to do, and the cleverest criminal can do no more. Besides which, we all know that every criminal commits some stupidity, and leaves some trace behind him. If it is really a crime, of which we have found the trace here, we will soon discover it."

"Very well, then do what you can," said the commissioner, with a friendly smile.

The older man nodded, took the book and its wrappings from the desk, and went into a small adjoining room.

The commissioner sent for an attendant and gave him the order to fetch a pot of tea from a neighboring saloon. When the tray arrived he placed several good cigars upon it, and sent it in to Müller. Taking a cigar himself, the commissioner leaned back in his sofa corner to think over this first interesting case of his short professional experience.

In his little room the detective, put in a good humor by the thoughtful attention of his chief, sat down to read the book carefully. While he studied its contents his mind went back over his search in the silent street outside.

He and Amster had hurried out into the raw chill of the night. They reached the spot of the first discovery in about ten or fifteen minutes. Müller found nothing new there. But he was able to discover in which direction the wagon had been going. The hoof-prints of the single horse which had drawn it were still plainly to be seen in the snow.

"Will you follow these tracks in the direction from which

they have come?" he asked of Amster. "Then meet me at the station and report what you have seen."

"Very well, sir," answered the workman. The two men parted with a hand-shake.

Before Müller started on to follow up the tracks in the other direction, he took up one of the larger pieces of glass.

"Cheap glass," he said, looking at it carefully. "It was only a hired cab therefore, and a one-horse cab at that."

He walked on slowly, following the marks of the wheels. His eyes searched the road from side to side, looking for any other signs that might have been left by the hand which had thrown the package out of the window. The snow, which had been falling softly thus far, began to come down in heavier flakes, and Müller quickened his pace. The tracks would soon be covered, but they could still be plainly seen. They led out into the open country, but when the first little hill had been climbed a drift heaped itself up, cutting off the trail completely.

Müller stood on the top of this knoll at a spot where the street divided. Towards the right it led down into a factory suburb; towards the left to a residence colony; and straight ahead was open country, fields, pastures, farms, and moors, beyond which was another town of considerable size. Müller knew all this, but his knowledge of the locality was of little avail, for all trace of the carriage wheels was lost.

He followed each one of the streets for a little distance, but to no avail. The wind blew up the snow in such heaps that it was quite impossible to follow any trail under these conditions.

With an expression of impatience Müller gave up his search and turned to go back again. He was hoping that Amster might have had better luck. It was not possible to find the goal towards which the wagon had taken its prisoner, if she were indeed a prisoner—as soon as they had hoped. Perhaps the search must be made in the direction from which she had been brought.

Müller turned back towards the city again. He walked more quickly now, but his eyes took in everything to the

right and to the left of his path. Near the place where the street divided, a bush waved its bare twigs in the wind. The snow, which had settled on it early in the day, had been blown away by the freshening wind, and just as Müller neared the bush he saw something white fluttering from one twig. It was a handkerchief, which had probably hung heavy and lifeless when he had passed that way before. Now, when the wind held it outright, he saw it at once. He loosened it carefully from the thorny twigs. A delicate and rather unusual perfume wafted up to his face. There was more of the odor on the little cloth than is commonly used by persons of good taste. This handkerchief was far too fine and delicate in texture to belong to the sort of people who habitually passed along this street. It must have some connection with the mysterious wagon. It was still quite dry, and in spite of the fact that the wind had been playing with it, it had been but slightly torn. It could, therefore, have been in that position for a short time only. At the nearest lantern Müller saw that the monogram on the handkerchief was the same in style and initials as on the notebook, the letters A. L.

II

It was warm and comfortable in the little room where Müller sat. He closed the windows, lit the gas, took off his overcoat—Müller was a pedantically careful person—smoothed his hair, and sat down comfortably at the table. Just as he took up the little book, the attendant brought the tea, which he proceeded at once to enjoy. He did not take up his little book again until he had lit himself a cigar. He looked at the outside of the dainty volume for many minutes before he opened it. It was a couple of inches long, of the usual shape, and had a cover of brown leather. In the left upper corner were the letters A. L. in gold. The leaves of the book, about fifty in all, were of a fine quality of paper and all closely written. On the first leaves the

writing was fine, delicate, and orderly. But later on the letters became irregular and uncertain, as if written tremblingly or in terror. The change came in those leaves of the book which followed after the strange and terrible title, "*How I was murdered.*"

Before Müller began to read he felt the covers of the book carefully. In one of them there was a tiny pocket in which he found a little piece of wall paper of a noticeable and distinctly ugly pattern. The paper had a dark blue ground with clumsy lines of gold on it. In the pocket he found also a tramway ticket, which had been crushed and then carefully smoothed out again. After looking at these papers, Müller put them back again into the cover of the notebook. The book itself was strongly perfumed with the same odor which had exhaled from the handkerchief.

The detective did not begin his reading in that part of the book which followed the mysterious title, as the commissioner had done. He began instead at the very first words.

"Ah—she is still young," he murmured when he had read the first lines. "Young, in easy circumstances, happy, and contented."

These first pages told of pleasure trips, of visits from and to good friends, of many little events of every-day life. Then came accounts, written in pencil, of shopping expeditions to the city. Costly laces and jewels had been bought, and linen garments for children by the dozen. "She is rich, generous, and charitable," thought the detective, for the book showed that the considerable sums which had been spent here had not been for the writer herself. The laces were "for our church"; behind the account for the linen stood the words, "for the charity school."

Müller began to feel a strong sympathy for the writer of these notices. She showed an orderly, almost pedantic character, mingled with generosity of heart. He turned leaf after leaf, until he finally came to the words, written in intentionally heavy letters, "*How I was murdered.*"

Müller's head sank down lower over these mysterious

words, and his eyes flew through the writing that followed. It was quite a different writing here. The hand that penned these lines must have trembled in mighty terror. Was it terror of coming death, foreseen and not to be escaped? or was it the trembling and the terror of a overthrown brain? It was undoubtedly, in spite of the differences, the same hand which had penned the first pages of the book. A few characteristic turns of the letters were plain to be seen in both parts of the story. But the ink was quite different. The first pages had been written with a delicate violet ink, the latter leaves were penned with a black ink of uneven quality, of a kind used by poor people who write seldom. The words of this later portion of the book were blurred in many places, as if the writer had not been able to dry them properly before she turned the leaves. She, therefore, had had neither blotting paper nor sand at her disposal. And then the weird title!—Was it written at the dictation of insanity? or did A. L. know while she wrote it, that it was too late for any help to reach her?

Did she see her doom approaching so clearly that she knew there was no escape.

Müller breathed a deep breath before he continued his reading. Later on, his breath came more quickly and he clinched his fists several times, as if deeply moved. He was not a cold man, merely thoroughly self-controlled. In his breast there lived an unquenchable hatred toward all evil. It was this that had awakened the talents which made him the celebrated detective he had become.—"I fear that it will be impossible for anyone to save me now, but perhaps I may be avenged. Therefore, I will write down here all that has happened to me since I set out on my journey." These were the first words that were written under the mysterious title. Müller had just read them when the commissioner entered.

"Will you speak to Amster? He has just returned," he asked.

Müller rose at once. "Certainly. Did you telegraph to all the railway stations?"

"Yes," answered the commissioner, "and also to the other police stations."

"And to the hospitals? And to the various insane asylums?"

"No, I did not do that." Commissioner Von Mayringen blushed, a blush that was as becoming to him as was his frank acknowledgment of his mistake. He went out to remedy it at once, while Müller heard Amster's short and not particularly important report. The workingman was shivering, and the detective handed him a glass of tea with a good portion of rum in it.

"Here, drink this, you are cold—are you ill?"

Amster smiled sadly. "No, I am not ill, but I was discharged to-day, and am out of work now—that's almost as bad."

"Are you married?"

"No, but I have an old mother."

"Leave your address with the commissioner. He may be able to find work for you; we can always use good men. But now drink your tea." Amster drank the glass in one gulp. "Well, now we have lost the trail in both directions," said Müller calmly. "But we will find it again. You can help—as you are free now, anyway. If you have the talent for that sort of thing, you may find permanent work here."

A gesture and a look from the workingman showed the detective that the former did not think very highly of such occupation. Müller laid his hand on the other's shoulder, and said gravely: "You wouldn't care to take service with us?—This sort of thing doesn't seem very high, I know. But I tell you that if we have our hearts in the right place and our brains are worth anything, we are of more use to humanity than many a good citizen who wouldn't shake hands with us. There—and now I am busy. Good-night."

With these words Müller pushed the astonished man out of the room, shut the door, and sat down again with his little book. This was what he read:—

"Wednesday,—is it Wednesday? They brought me a

newspaper to-day which had the date of Wednesday the 20th of November. The ink still smells fresh, but it is so damp here. The paper may have been older. I do not know, therefore, what day it is that I begin to write this account. I do not know either, whether I may not have been ill for days and weeks. I do not know what may have been the matter with me—I only know that I was unconscious, and that when I came to myself again, I found myself here in this gloomy room. Did any doctor see me? I have seen no one until to-day, except the old woman, whose name I do not know, and who has so little to say. She is kind to me otherwise, but I am afraid of her hard face and of the smile with which she answers all my questions and my entreaties. 'You are ill'—these are the only words that she has ever said to me, and she pointed to her forehead as she spoke them. She thinks I am insane apparently, or she pretends to think so.

"What a hoarse voice she has! She must be ill herself, for she coughs all night long. I can hear it through the wall, she sleeps in the next room. But I am not ill—that is, I am not ill in the way she says. I have no fever now—my pulse is calm and regular. I can remember everything, until I took that drink of tea in the railway station. What could there have been in the tea? I suppose I should have noticed how anxious the stranger was to have me drink it.

"Who could the man have been? He was so polite, so fatherly in his anxiety about me. I have not seen him since then. And yet I feel that it is he who has brought me into this trap, a trap from which I may never escape alive. I will describe him. He is very tall, stout, and blond, and wears a long heavy beard which is slightly mixed with gray, On his right cheek his beard only partly hides a long scar. His eyes are hidden by large smoked glasses. His voice is low and gentle, his manners most correct—except for his giving people poison, or whatever else it was, in that tea.

"I did not suffer any—at least I do not remember anything except becoming unconscious. And I seem to have felt a pain like an iron ring around my head. But I am not

insane, and this fear that I feel does not spring from my imagination, but from the real danger by which I am surrounded. I am very hungry, but I do not dare to eat anything except eggs, which cannot be tampered with. I tasted some soup yesterday, and it seemed to me that it had a queer taste. I will eat nothing that is at all suspicious. I will be in my full senses when my murderers come; they shall not kill me by poison at least.

"When I came to myself again (it was the evening of the day before yesterday), I found a letter on the little table beside my bed. It was written in French, in a handwriting that I had never seen before, and there was no signature.

"This strange letter demanded of me that I should write to my guardian, calmly and clearly, to say that for reasons which I did not intend to reveal, I had taken my own life. If I did this, my present place of sojourn would be exchanged for a far more agreeable one, and I would soon be quite free. But if I did not do it, I would actually be put to death. A pen, ink, and paper were ready there for the answer.

"'Never!' I wrote. And then despair came over me.—I may have indeed appeared insane. The old woman came in, and I entreated and implored her to tell me why this dreadful fate should have overtaken me. She remained quite indifferent, and I sank back, almost fainting, on the bed. She laid a moist cloth over my face, a cloth that had a peculiar odor. I soon fell asleep. It seemed to me that there was someone else beside the woman in the room with me. Or was she talking to herself? Next morning the letter and my answer had disappeared.

"It was as I thought. There was someone else in my room. Someone who had come on the tramway. I found the ticket on the carpet beside my bed. I took it up and put it in my notebook——

"I believe that it is Sunday to-day. It is four days now since I have been conscious. The first sound that I remember hearing was the blast of a horn. It must come from a factory, very near me. The old windows in my

room rattle at the sound. I hear it mornings and evenings and at noon, on week-days. I did not hear it to-day, so it must be Sunday. It was Monday, the 18th of November, that I set out on my trip and reached here in the evening—(here? I do not know where I am)—that is, I set out for the Capital and know that I reached the Northern Railway Station there in safety.

"I was cold and felt a little faint—and then he offered me the tea—and what happened after that? Where am I? The paper that they gave me may have been a day old or more. And to-day is Sunday. Is it the first Sunday since my departure from home? I do not know. I know only this, that I set out on the 18th of November, to visit my kind old guardian, and to have a last consultation with him before my coming of age. And I know also that I have fallen into the hands of someone who has an interest in my disappearance.

"There was someone in the next room with the old woman. I heard a man's voice and they were quarreling. They are talking of me. He wanted her to do something which she will not do. He commanded her to go away, but she refused. What does he mean to do? I do not want her to leave me alone. I do not hate her any more, I know that she is not bad. When I listened I heard her speaking of me as of an insane person. She really believes that I am ill. When the man went away he must have been angry. He stamped down the stairs until the steps creaked under his tread. I know from that that it is a wooden staircase.

"I am safe from him to-day, but I am really ill of fright. Am I really insane? There is one thing that I have forgotten to write down. When I first came to myself I found a bit of paper beside me on which was written, 'Beware of calling in help from outside. One scream will mean death to you.' It was written in French like the letter. Why? Was it because the old woman should not read it? She knew of the piece of paper, for she took it away from me. It frightens me that I should have forgotten to write this

down. Am I really ill? If I am not yet ill, this terrible solitude will make me so.

"What a gloomy room this is, this prison of mine. And such a strange ugly wall paper. I tore off a tiny bit of it and hid it in this little book. Someone may find it some day, and may discover from it this place where I am suffering, and where I shall, perhaps, die. There cannot be many who would buy such a pattern, and it must be possible to find the factory where it was made. And I will also write down here what I can see from my barred window. Far down below me there is a rusty tin roof; it looks as if it might belong to a sort of shed. Before me and to the right of me there are windowless walls, to the left at a little distance I can see a slender church spire, greenish in color, probably covered with copper, and before the church there are two poplar trees of different height.

"Another day has passed, a day of torturing fear. Am I really insane? I know that I see queer things. This morning I looked toward the window and I saw a parrot sitting there. I saw it quite plainly. It ruffled up its red and green feathers and stared at me. I stared back at it, and suddenly it was gone. I shivered. Finally I pulled myself together and went to the window. There was no bird outside, nor was there any trace of it in the snow on the window sill. Could the wind have blown away its tracks so soon? or was it really my sick brain that appeared to see this tropical bird in the midst of the snow? It is Tuesday to-day; from now on I will carefully count the days—the days that still remain to me.

"This morning I asked the old woman about the parrot. She only smiled and her smile made me terribly afraid. The thought that this thing that is happening to me, this thing that I took to be a crime, may be only a necessity—this thought fills me with horror. Am I in a prison? or is this the cell of an insane asylum? Am I the victim of a villain—or am I really mad? My pulse is quickening, but my memory is quite clear. I can look back over every incident in my life——

"She has just taken away my food. I asked her to bring me only eggs, as I was afraid of everything else. She promised that she would do it.

"Are they looking for me? My guardian is Theodore Fellner; Church Street 14. My own name is Asta Langen.

"They took away my traveling bag, but they did not find this little book and a tiny flask of perfume which I had in the pocket of my dress. And I found this old pen and a little ink in a drawer of the writing table in my room.

"Wednesday. The stranger was here again to-day. I recognize his soft voice. He spoke to the woman in the hall outside my room. I listened, but I could catch only a few words: 'To-morrow evening—I will come myself—— No responsibility for you.' Were these words meant for me? Are they going to take me away? Where will they take me? Then they do not dare to kill me here? My head is burning hot. I have not dared to drink a drop of liquid for four days. I dare not take anything in which they might have put some drug or some poison.

"Who could have such interest in my death? It cannot be because of the fortune which is to be mine when I come of age; for if I die my father has willed it to various charitable institutions. I have no relatives, at least none who could inherit my money. I have never harmed anyone—who can wish for my death?

"There is somebody with her—somebody was listening at my door. I have a feeling as if I was being watched. And yet—— I examined the door, but there is no crack anywhere and the key is in the lock. Yet I seemed to feel a burning glance resting upon me. Ah—the parrot! Is this another delusion? Oh, God, let it end soon! I am not yet quite insane, but all these unknown dangers around me will drive me mad. But I will fight against them.

"Thursday. They brought me back my traveling bag. My attendant is uneasy. She was longer in cleaning up the room than usual to-day. She seemed to want to say something to me, and yet she did not dare to speak. Is something to happen to-day, then? I did not close my eyes all night.

Can one be made insane from a distance, hypnotized into it, as it were? I will not allow fear alone to make me mad. My enemy shall not find it too easy. He may kill my body, but that is all——"

These were the last words which Asta Langen had written in her notebook, the little book which was the only confidant of her terrible need. When the detective had finished reading it, he closed his eyes for a few minutes to go over in spirit the impressions he had won.

Then he rose and put on his overcoat. He entered the commissioner's room and took up his hat and cane.

"Where are you going, Müller?" asked Mr. Von Mayringen.

"To Church Street, if you will permit it."

"At this hour? It is quarter-past seven! Is there any such hurry, do you think? There is no train from any of our stations until morning. And I have already sent a policeman to watch the house. Besides I know that Fellner is a highly respected man."

"There is many a man who is highly respected until he is found out," remarked the detective.

"And you are going to find out about Fellner?" smiled the commissioner. "And this evening, too?"

"This very evening. If he is asleep I shall wake him up. That is the best time to find out the truth about a man."

The commissioner sat down at his desk and wrote out the necessary credentials for the detective. A moment later Müller was already in the street. He left the notebook with the commissioner. It was snowing heavily, and an icy north wind was howling through the streets. Müller turned up the collar of his coat and walked on quickly. It was just striking a quarter to twelve when he reached Church Street. As he walked slowly along the moonlit side of the pavement, a man stepped out of the shadow to meet him. It was the policeman who had been set to watch the house. Like Müller, he wore plain clothes.

"Well?" the latter asked.

"Nothing new. Mr. Fellner has been ill in bed several days, quite seriously ill they tell me. The janitor seems very fond of him.

"H'm—— We'll see what sort of a man he is. You can go back to the station now; you must be nearly frozen, standing here."

Müller looked carefully at the house which bore the number 14. It was a handsome old-fashioned building, a true patrician house, which looked worthy of all confidence. But Müller knew that the outside of a house has very little to do with the honesty of the people who live in it. He rang the bell carefully, as he wished no one but the janitor to hear him.

The latter did not seem at all surprised to find a stranger asking for the owner of the house at so late an hour. "You come with a telegram, I suppose? Come right upstairs then; I have orders to let you in."

These were the words with which the old janitor greeted Müller. The detective could see from this that Mr. Theodore Fellner's conscience must be perfectly clear. The expected telegram probably had something to do with the non-appearance of Asta Langen, of whose terrible fate her guardian evidently as yet knew nothing. The janitor knocked on one of the doors, which was opened in a few moments by an old woman.

"Is it the telegram?" she asked sleepily.

"Yes," said the janitor.

"No," said Müller, "but I want to speak to Mr. Fellner."

The two old people stared at him in surprise.

"To speak to him?" said the woman, and shook her head as if in doubt. "Is it about Miss Langen?"

"Yes, please wake him up."

"But he is ill and the doctor——"

"Please wake him up, I will take the responsibility."

"But who are you?" asked the janitor.

Müller smiled a little at this belated caution on the part of the old man and answered, "I will tell Mr. Fellner who

I am. But please announce me at once. It is indeed because of the young lady that I come." His expression was so grave that the woman waited no longer, but let him in and then disappeared into another door. The janitor stood and looked at Müller with half-distrustful, half-anxious glances.

"It's no good news you bring," he said after a few minutes.

"You may be right."

"Has anything happened to our dear young lady?"

"Then you know Miss Asta Langen and her family?"

"Why, of course. I was in service on the estate when all the dreadful things happened."

"What things?"

"Why, the divorce—and—but you are a stranger, and I shouldn't talk about these family affairs to you. You had better tell me what has happened to our young lady."

"I must tell that to your master first."

The woman came back at this moment and said to Müller, "Come with me. Berner, you are to stay here until the gentleman goes again."

Müller followed her through several rooms to a large bed-chamber, where he found an elderly man, very evidently ill, lying in the bed.

"Who are you?" asked the sick man, raising his head from the pillow. The woman had gone out and closed the door behind her.

"My name is Müller, police detective. Here are my credentials."

Fellner glanced hastily at the paper. "Why do the police send to me?"

"It concerns your ward."

Fellner sat upright in bed now. He leaned over toward his visitor as he said . . . pointing to a letter on the table beside his bed: "Asta's overseer writes me from her estate that she left home on the 18th of November to visit me. She should have reached here on the evening of the 18th, and she has not yet arrived. I did not receive this letter until to-day."

"Did you expect the young lady?"

"I only knew that she would arrive sometime before the 3d of December. That date is her twenty-fourth birthday, and she was to celebrate it here."

"Did she not usually announce her coming to you?"

"No, she liked to surprise me. Three days ago I sent her a telegram, to ask her to bring certain necessary papers with her. This brought the answer from the overseer of her estate, an answer which has caused me great anxiety. Your coming makes it worse, for I fear——" The sick man broke off and turned his eyes on Müller, so full of fear and grief that the detective's heart softened. He felt Fellner's icy hand on his, as the sick man murmured, "Tell me the truth—is Asta dead?"

The detective shrugged his shoulders. "We do not know yet. She was alive and able to send a message at half-past eight this evening."

"A message. To whom?"

"To the nearest police station." Müller told what he knew thus far.

The old man listened with an expression of such utter, dazed terror, that the detective dropped all suspicion of him at once.

"What a terrible riddle," stammered the sick man, as the other finished the story.

"Would you answer me several questions?" asked Müller. The old gentleman answered quickly: "Any one—every one——"

"Miss Langen is rich?"

"She has a fortune of over three hundred thousand guldens, and considerable land."

"Has she any relatives?"

"No," replied Fellner harshly. But a thought must have flashed through his brain, for he started suddenly and murmured, "Yes, she has one relative—a step-brother."

The detective gave an exclamation of surprise. "Why are you astonished at this?" asked Fellner.

"According to her notebook, the young lady does not seem to know of this stepbrother."

"She does not know of him. There was an ugly scandal in her family before her birth. Her father turned his first wife and their son out of his house on one and the same day. He had discovered that she was deceiving him, and also that her son, who was studying medicine at the time, had stolen money from his safe. What he had discovered about his wife made Langen doubt whether the boy was his son at all. There was a terrible scene, and the two disappeared from the home forever. The woman died soon after. The young man went to Australia. He has never been heard of since, and he has probably come to no good."

"Might he not possibly be here in Europe again, watching for an opportunity to make a fortune?"

Fellner's hand grasped that of his visitor. The eyes of the two men gazed steadily at each other. The old man's glance was full of sudden helpless horror, the detective's eyes shone brilliantly. Müller spoke calmly: "This is one clew. Is there no one else who could have an interest in the young lady's death?"

"No one but Egon Langen, if he bears this name by right —and if he is still alive."

"How old would he be now?"

"He must be nearly forty. It was many years before Langen married again."

"Do you know him personally?"

"No."

"Have you a picture of Miss Langen?"

Fellner rang a bell, and Berner appeared. "Give this gentleman Miss Asta's picture. Take the one in the silver frame on my desk." The old gentleman's voice was friendly but weak with fatigue. His old servant looked at him in deep anxiety. Fellner smiled feebly and nodded to the man. "Sad news, Berner! Sad news, and bad news! Our poor Asta is being held a prisoner by some unknown villain who threatens her with death."

"My God—— Is it possible? Can't we help the dear young lady?"

"We will try to help her—or if it is—too late, we will at least avenge her. My entire fortune shall be given up for it. But bring the picture now."

Berner brought in the picture of a very pretty girl with a bright, intelligent face. Müller took the picture out of the frame and put it in his pocket.

"You will come soon again—and remember, I will give ten thousand guldens to the man who saves Asta, or avenges her. And tell the police to spare no expense—I will go to headquarters myself to-morrow."

Fellner was a little surprised that Müller, although he had already taken up his hat, did not go. The sick man had seen the light flash up in the eyes of the other as he named the sum. He thought he understood this excitement, but it touched him unpleasantly, and he sank back almost frightened in his cushions as the detective bent over him with the words: "Do not forget your promise, for I will save Miss Langen or avenge her. But I do not want the money for myself. It is to go to those who have been unjustly convicted and ruined for life. It may give the one or the other of them a better chance for the future."

"And you—what good do you get from that?" asked the old gentleman, astonished. A soft smile illumined the detective's hard features and he answered gently: "I know then that there will be some poor fellow who has an easier time of it—than I had."

He nodded to Fellner—who had already grasped his hand and pressed it hard. A tear ran down into his gray beard, and long after Müller had gone the old gentleman lay pondering over his last words.

Berner led the visitor to the door. As he was opening it Müller asked: "Egon Langen has a bad scar on his right cheek, has he not?"

Berner's eyes looked his astonishment. How did the stranger know this? And how did he come to mention this forgotten name? "Yes—he has—but how did you know

it?" he murmured in surprise. He received no answer, for Müller was already walking quickly down the street. The old man stared after him for some few minutes—then suddenly his knees began to tremble. He closed the door with difficulty, then sank down on a bench beside it. The wind had blown out the light of his lantern—Berner was sitting in the dark without knowing it. A sudden terrible light had burst upon his soul, so sharply that he hid his eyes with his hands, and his old lips murmured: "Horrible! The brother against the sister."

The next morning was clear and bright. Müller was up early, for he had taken but a few hours' sleep in one of the rooms of the station before he set out into the cold winter morning. At the next corner he found Amster waiting for him. "What are you doing here?" he asked in astonishment.

"I have been thinking over what you said to me yesterday. Your profession is as good and perhaps better than many another."

"And you come out here so early to tell me that?"

Amster smiled. "I have something else to say."

"Indeed?"

"The commissioner asked me yesterday if I knew of a church in the city that had a slender spire with a green top and two poplars in front of it."

Müller looked his interest.

"I thought it might possibly be the Convent Church of the Grey Sisters—but I wasn't sure—so I went there an hour ago. It's all right, just as I thought. And as I suppose it has something to do with the case of last night I thought I had better report at once. I was on my way to the station."

"You have done well. You have saved us much time and have shown that you are eminently fitted for this business."

"If you really will try me—then——"

"We'll see. You can begin on this. Come to the church with me now."

The two men walked on quickly. In about half an hour they found themselves in a little square, in the middle of which stood an old church. Before the church, like giant sentinels, stood a pair of tall poplars. One of them looked sickly and was a good deal shorter than its neighbor. Müller nodded as if content.

"Is this the church the commissioner was asking about?" asked Amster.

"It is," was the answer. Müller walked on toward a little house built up against the church, evidently the dwelling of the sexton.

The detective introduced himself to this official, who did not look over-intelligent, as a stranger in the city who had been told that the view from the tower of this church was particularly interesting. A bright silver piece caused all distrust to disappear from the soul of the worthy man. With great friendliness he inquired when the gentlemen would like to ascend the tower. "At once," was the answer.

The sexton took a bunch of keys and told the strangers to follow him. A few moments later Müller and his companion stood in the tiny belfry room of the slender spire. The fat sexton, to his own great satisfaction, had been requested to remain below. The cloudless sky lay crystal-clear over the still sleeping city, and over the widespread snow-covered fields which lay close at hand on one side of the church. To the right were gardens and the low rambling buildings of the convent. To the left the huddled, high-piled dwellings of poverty.

Müller looked out of each of the four windows in turn. He spent some time at each window, but evidently without discovering what he looked for, for he shook his head in discontent. But when he went once more to the opening towards the East, into which the sun was just beginning to pour its light, something seemed to attract his attention. He called up Amster and pointed from the window. "Your eyes are twenty years younger than mine, lend them to me. What do you see over there to the right, below the tall

factory chimney?" Müller's voice was calm, but there was something in his manner that revealed excitement. Amster caught the infection without knowing why.

He looked sharply towards the direction in which Müller pointed and began: "To the right of the chimney I see a tall house, which is crowded in between other, newer buildings. This house seems to be very old and much more expensive than its neighbors. There are carvings and statues on it, the snow is lying on them. But the house is in bad condition, there are cracks in the wall we can see from here."

"And its windows?"

"I cannot see them. They are on the other side of the house, towards a courtyard which is inclosed by blank walls of other houses."

"And towards the front?"

"There is a low wall in front, which shuts off the courtyard from a narrow, neglected alley."

"I see it now myself. The alley leads through gardens and open lots."

"Yes, sir, that is it." Müller nodded as if satisfied. Amster looked at him in surprise, still more surprised, however, at the excitement he felt himself. He did not understand it, but Müller understood it. He knew that he had found in Amster a talent akin to his own, one of those natures who, once having taken up a trail, cannot rest until they reach the goal. He looked for a few moments in satisfaction at the assistant he had found by such chance, then he turned and hastened down the stair again.

"We're going to that house?" asked Amster when they were down in the street. Müller nodded.

Without hesitation the two men made their way through a tangle of dingy, uninteresting streets between modern tenements, until, about ten minutes later, they stood before an old three-storied building, which had a frontage of only four windows on the street. "This is our place," said the detective, looking up at the tall handsome gateway and the rococo carvings that ornamented the front of this decaying

dwelling. It was very evidently of a different age and class from those about it.

Müller had already raised his hand to pull the bell, then he stopped and let it sink again. His eye had caught a placard pasted up on the wall of the next house and already half torn off by the wind. The detective walked over and raising the placard with his cane, he read the words on it.

"That's all right," he said to himself. Amster had thrown a look at the paper. But he could not connect the contents of the notice with the case of the kidnaped lady, and he shook his head in surprise when Müller turned to him with the words: "The lady we are looking for is *not* insane." On the paper was announced in large letters that a reward would be given to the finder of a red and green parrot which had escaped from a neighboring house.

Müller rang the bell, and they had to wait some few minutes before the door opened with great creakings, and the tousled head of an old woman looked out.

"What do you want?" she asked hoarsely, with distrustful looks.

"Let us in, and then give us the keys of the upstairs rooms." Müller's voice was friendly, but the woman grew perceptibly paler.

"Who are you?" she stammered. Müller threw back his overcoat and showed her his badge. "But there is nobody here, the house is quite empty."

"There were a lady and gentleman here last evening." The woman threw a frightened look at Müller, then she said hesitatingly: "The lady was insane, and has been taken to an asylum."

"That is what the man told you. He is a criminal and the police are looking for him."

"Come with me," murmured the woman. She seemed to understand that further resistance was useless. She carefully locked the outside door. Amster remained downstairs in the corridor, while Müller followed the old woman up the stairs. The staircase to the third story was made of

wood. The house was evidently very old, with low ceilings and many dark corners.

The woman led Müller into the room in which she had cared for the strange lady at the order of the latter's "husband." He had told her that it was to be for a short time only, until he could take the lady to an asylum. One look at the wall paper, a glance out of the window,—and Müller knew that this was where Asta Langen had been imprisoned. He sat down on a chair and looked at the woman, who stood, frightened, before him.

"Do you know where they have taken the lady?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know the gentleman's name?"

"No, sir."

"You did not send the lady's name to the authorities?"*

"No, sir."

"Were you not afraid you would get into trouble?"

"The gentleman paid me well, and I did not think that he meant anything wrong, and—and——"

"And you did not think that it would be found out," said Müller sternly.

"I took good care of the lady."

"Yes, we know that."

"Did she escape from her husband?"

"He was not her husband. But now tell me all you know about these people. The more truthful you are the better it will be for you."

The old woman was so frightened that she could scarcely find strength to talk. When she finally got control of herself again she began: "He came here on the 1st of November and rented this room for himself. But he was here only twice before he brought the lady and left her alone here. She was very ill when he brought her here, so ill that he had to carry her upstairs. I wanted to go for a doctor, but he said he was a doctor himself, and that he

* Any stranger taking rooms at a hotel or lodging house in Germany must be registered with the police authorities by the proprietor of the house within forty-eight hours of arrival.

could take care of his wife, who often had such attacks. He gave me some medicine for her after I had put her to bed. I gave her the drops, but it was a long while before she came to herself again.

"Then he told me that she had lost her mind, and that she believed that everybody was trying to harm her. She was so bad that he was taking her to an asylum. But he hadn't found quite the right place yet, and wanted me to keep her here until he knew where he would take her. Once he left a revolver here by mistake. But I hid it so the lady wouldn't see it, and gave it to the gentleman the next time he came. He was angry at that, and said that I shouldn't have touched it."

The woman had told her story with much hesitation, and stopped altogether at this point. She had evidently suddenly realized that the lady was not insane, but only in great despair, and that people in such a state will often seek death, particularly if a weapon is left conveniently within their reach.

"What did this gentleman look like?" asked Müller, to start her talking again. She described her tenant as very tall and stout, with a long beard, slightly mixed with gray. She had never seen his eyes, for he wore smoked glasses.

"Did you notice anything particular about his face."

"No, nothing except that his beard was very heavy and almost covered his face."

"Could you see his cheeks at all?"

"No, or else I didn't notice."

"Did he leave nothing that might enable us to find him?"

"No, sir, nothing. Or yes, perhaps—but I don't suppose that will be any good."

"What was it? What do you mean?"

"It gave him a good deal of trouble to get the lady into the wagon, because she had fainted again. He lost his glove doing it. I have it downstairs in my room, for I sleep downstairs again since the lady has gone."

Müller had risen from his chair and walked over to the old writing desk which stood beside one window. There

were several sheets of ordinary paper on it and a sharp-pointed pencil, and also—something not usually found on writing desks—a piece of bread from which some of the inside had been taken. "Everything as I expected it," he said to himself. "The young lady made up the package in the last few moments that she was left alone here."

He turned again to the old woman and commanded her to lead him downstairs. "What sort of a carriage was it in which they took the lady away?" he asked as they went down.

"A closed coupé."

"Did you see the number?"

"No, sir. But the carriage was very shabby, and so was the driver."

"Was he an old man?"

"He was about forty years old, but he looked like a man who drank. He had a light overcoat on."

"Good. Is this your room?"

"Yes, sir."

They were down again in the lower corridor, where they found Amster walking up and down. The woman opened the door of the little room, and took a glove from a cupboard. Müller put it in his pocket and told the woman not to leave the house, as she might be sent for to come to the police station at any moment. Then he went out into the street with Amster. When they were outside in the bright light he looked at the glove. It was of a remarkably small size, made for a man with a slender, delicate hand, not at all in accord with the large, stout body of the man described by the landlady. Müller put his hand into the glove and found something pushed up into the middle finger. He took it out; it was a crumpled tramway ticket.

"Look out for a shabby old closed coupé, with a driver about forty, who looks like a drunkard, and wears a light overcoat. If you find such a one, engage it and drive in it to the nearest police station. Tell them there to hold the man until further notice. If the wagon is not free, at least take the number. And one thing more—but you will know

that yourself—the cab we are looking for will have new glass in the right-hand window." Thus Müller spoke to his companion, as he put the glove in his pocket and unfolded the tramway ticket. Amster understood that they had found the starting point of the drive of the night before.

"I will go to all coupé stands," he said eagerly.

"Yes—but we may be able to find it quicker than that." Müller took out the little notebook, which he was now carrying in his pocket, and took from it the tramway ticket which was in the cover. He compared it with the one just found. They were both marked for the same hour of the day and for the same ride.

"Did the man use them?" asked Amster. The detective nodded. "How can they help us?"

"Somewhere on this stretch of the street railroad you will probably find the stand of the cab we are looking for. The man who hired it evidently arrived on the 6.30 train at the West Station—I have reason to believe that he does not live here—and then took the street car to this corner. This last ticket is marked for yesterday. In the car he will probably have arranged his plan to hire a cab. So you had better stay along the line of the car tracks. You will find me in room 7, police headquarters, at noon to-day. The authorities have already taken up the case. You may have something to tell us then. Good luck to you."

Müller hurried on, stopping only to take a hasty breakfast in a little café. He went at once to headquarters, made his report there, and then drove to Fellner's house. The latter was awaiting him with great impatience. Here the detective gathered much valuable information about the first marriage of Asta Langen's long-dead father. It was old Berner who could tell him most about these long-vanished days.

When he reached his office at headquarters again, he found telegrams in great number awaiting him. They were from all the hospitals and insane asylums in the entire district. But in none of them had there been a patient fitting the description of the vanished girl. Neither the commissioner nor Müller was surprised at this negative

result. They were also not surprised at all that the various public authorities knew so little about the personality of the young lady. They were aware that they had to deal with a criminal of great ability, who would be careful not to fall into the usual slips made by his kind.

There was no news from the cab either, although several detectives were out looking for it. It was almost nightfall when Amster came breathlessly into room 7. "I have him, he's waiting outside across the way!" This was Amster's report.

Müller threw his coat on hastily. "You didn't pay him, did you? On a cold day like this the drivers don't like to wait long in any one place."

"No danger. I haven't money enough for that," replied Amster, with a sad smile. Müller did not hear him, as he was already outside. But the commissioner with whom he had been talking, and to whom Müller had already spoken of his voluntary assistant, entered into a conversation with Amster, and said to him finally: "I will take it upon myself to guarantee your future, if you are ready to enter the secret service under Müller. If you wish to do this, you can stay right on now, for I think we will need you in this case."

Amster bowed in agreement. His life had been troubled, his reputation darkened by no fault of his own, and the work he was doing now had awakened an interest and an ability that he did not know he possessed. He was more than glad to accept the offer made by the official.

Müller was already across the street and had laid his hand upon the door of the cab, when the driver turned to him and said crossly: "Someone else has hired me. But I am not going to wait in this cold. Get in if you want to."

"All right. But tell me first where you drove to last evening with the sick lady and her companion?" The man looked astonished, but found his tongue again in a moment: "And who are you?" he asked calmly.

"We will tell you that upstairs in the police station," answered Müller equally calmly, and ordered the man to drive through the gateway into the inner courtyard. He

himself got into the wagon, and in the short time it took to drive in he had made a discovery. He had found a tiny glass stopper, such as is used in perfume bottles. He could understand from this why the odor of the perfume, which had now become familiar to him, was still so strong inside the old cab. Asta Langen had taken the stopper from the bottle in her pocket, so as to leave a trail of odor behind her.

III

Fifteen minutes after the driver had made his report to the commissioner for the day, the latter, with Amster, entered another cab. A well-armed policeman mounted the box of the second vehicle. "Follow that cab ahead," the commissioner told his driver. The second cab followed the one-horse coupé, in which Müller was seated. They drove first to 14 Church Street, where Müller told Berner to come with him. He found Mr. Fellner ready to go also, and it was with great difficulty that he could dissuade the invalid, who was already greatly fatigued by his morning visit to the police station, from joining them.

The wagons then drove off more quickly than before. It was now quite dark, a gloomy, stormy winter evening. Müller had taken his place on the box of his cab and sat peering out into the darkness. In spite of the sharp wind and the ice that blew against his face, the detective could see that they were going out from the more closely built up portions of the city, and were now in new streets with half-finished houses. Soon they passed even these and were outside of the city. The way was lonely and dreary, bordered by high wooden fences on both sides. Müller looked sharply to right and to left.

"You should have become suspicious here," he said to the driver, pointing to one part of the fence.

"Why?" asked the man.

"Because this is where the window was broken."

"I didn't know that—until I got home."

"H'm—— You must have been nicely drunk."

The driver murmured something in his beard.

"Stop here, this is your turn—down that street," Müller said a few moments later, as the driver turned the other way.

"How do you know that?" asked the man, surprised.

"None of your business."

"This street will take us there, just the same."

"Probably. But I prefer to go the way you took yesterday."

"Very well, it's all the same to me." They were silent again. The wind roared about them, and somewhere a foghorn sounded.

It was now six o'clock. The snow threw out a mild light which could not brighten the deep darkness around them. About half an hour later the first cab halted. "There's the house up there. Shall I drive to the garden gate?"

"No, stop here." Müller was already on the ground. "Are there any dogs here?" he asked.

"I didn't hear any yesterday."

"That doesn't mean anything. You didn't seem to hear much yesterday, anyway." Müller opened the door of the cab and helped Berner out. The old man was trembling. "That was a dreadful drive," he stammered.

"I hope you'll be happier on the drive back," said the detective with friendliness, and added: "You may stay here with the commissioner now."

The latter had already left his cab with his companion. His sharp eyes glanced over the heavily shaded garden and the little house in its midst. A little light came out from two windows of the first story. The men's eyes looked toward them, then the detective and Amster walked toward a high picket fence which inclosed the garden on the side towards its neighbors. They shook the various pickets without much caution, for the wind made noise enough to kill any other sound. Amster called to Müller in a moment. He had found a loose picket, and his strong young arms had soon torn it out. Müller motioned to the other three

to join them. A moment later they were all in the garden, walking carefully toward the house.

The door was closed, but there were no bars at the windows of the ground floor. Amster looked inquiringly at the commissioner, and the latter nodded, and said: "All right, go ahead." Amster broke one pane of the window and turned the latch. The inner window was broken already, so that it was not difficult for him to open it without any further noise. He disappeared into the dark room within, and in a few moments they heard a key turn in the door and it opened gently. The men entered, all except the policeman, who remained outside. The blind of his lantern was slightly opened, and he had his revolver ready in his hand.

Müller had opened his lantern also, and they saw that they were in a prettily furnished corridor, upon which the staircase and one door opened.

The four men tiptoed up the stairway and the commissioner stepped to the first of the two doors which opened upon the upper corridor. He turned the key, which was in the lock, and opened the door—but they found themselves in a room as dark as the corridor. From somewhere, however, a ray of light fell into the blackness. The official stepped into the room, pulling Berner after him. The poor old man was in a state of trembling excitement when he found himself in the house where his beloved young lady might already be lying dead. One step more and a smothered cry came from his lips. The commissioner had opened the door of the adjoining room, which was lighted and handsomely furnished. Only the heavy iron bars across the closed windows showed that the young lady, who was leaning back wearily in an armchair, was a prisoner.

She looked up as they entered. The expression of utter despair and deep weariness which had rested on her pale face changed to a look of terror—then she saw that it was not her murderer, who was entering, but those who came to rescue. . . . A bright flush illumined her cheeks and her eyes gleamed. But the change was too sudden for her tor-

tured soul. She rose from her chair, then sank fainting to the floor.

Berner threw himself on his knees beside her, sobbing out: "She is dying!"

Müller turned at the sound, for he had heard the door on the other side of the hall open, and a tall, slender man, with a smooth face and a deep scar on his right cheek, stood on the threshold, looking at them in dazed surprise. But for a moment only had he lost his control. The next second he was in his room again, slamming the door behind him. But it was too late. Amster's foot was already in the crack of the door, and he pushed it open to let Müller enter. "Well done," cried the latter, and then turned to the man in the room: "Here! stop that! I can shoot before you get that window open."

The man turned and walked slowly to the center of the room, sinking down into an armchair that stood beside the desk. Neither Amster nor Müller turned his eyes from him a moment, ready for any attempt on his part to escape. But the detective had already seen something that told him that Langen was not thinking of flight. When he turned to the desk, Müller had seen his eyes glisten, while a scornful smile parted his thin lips. A second later he had let his handkerchief fall, apparently carelessly, upon the desk. But in this short space of time the detective's sharp eyes had seen a tiny bottle, upon which was a black label with a grinning skull. Müller could not see whether the bottle was full or empty, but he knew that it must hold sufficient poison to enable the captured criminal to escape open disgrace. Knowing this, Müller looked with admiration at the calmness of this villain, whose intelligent eyes were turned towards him with evident curiosity.

"Who are you and who else is here with you?" asked the man calmly.

"Detective Müller," replied his visitor, and added: "You must put up with us two for the time being, Mr. Egon Langen. The police commissioner is occupied with your stepsister, whom you were about to murder."

Langen put his hand to his cheek, looking at Müller between his lashes, as he said: "To murder? Who can prove that?"

"We have all the proofs we need already."

"I will acknowledge only that I wanted Asta to disappear."

Müller smiled: "What good would that have done you? You wanted her entire fortune, did you not? But that could have come to you only after thirty years, and you are not likely to have waited that long. Your plan was to murder your stepsister, even if you could not get a letter from her telling of her intention to commit suicide."

Langen rose suddenly, but controlled himself again and sank back easily in his chair. "Then the old woman told?" he asked.

Müller shook his head. "We knew through Miss Langen herself."

"She has spoken to no one for over ten days."

"But you let her throw her notebook out of the window of the cab."

"Ah—!"

"There, you see, you should not have let that happen."

Drops of perspiration stood out on Langen's forehead. Until now, perhaps, he had had some possible hope of escape. Now it was all over, he knew.

As calmly as he had spoken thus far, Müller continued, "For thirty years I have been studying the hearts of criminals like yourself. But there are things I do not understand about this case, and it interests me very much."

Langen had wiped the drops from his forehead, and he now turned on Müller a face that seemed made of bronze. There was but one expression in it, that of cold scorn.

"I feel much flattered, old gentleman, to think that I can offer a riddle to one of your experience," the villain began. His voice, which had been slightly veiled before, was now quite clear. "Ask all you like, I will answer you."

Müller began: "Why did you wait so long before committing the murder? and why did you drag your victim from

place to place when you could have killed her easily in the compartment of the railway train?"

"The windows of the compartment were open, my honored friend, and it was a fine warm evening for the season, because of which the windows in the other compartments were also open. There was nothing I could do at that time then, except to offer Asta a cup of tea when she felt a little faint on leaving the train. I am a physician, and I know how to use the right drugs at the right time. When Asta had taken the tea she knew nothing more until she woke up a day later, in the room in the city."

"And the piece of paper with the threat on it, and the revolver you left so handy for her?—— Oh, but I forgot, the old woman took the weapon away before the lady could use it in her despair," said Müller.

"Quite right. I see you know every detail."

"But why did you not complete your crime in the room in the old house?" persisted Müller.

"Because I lost my false beard one day upon the staircase, and I feared the old woman might have seen my face, and recognized me again. I thought it better to look for another place."

"And then you found this house?"

"Yes, but several days later."

"And you hired it in the name of Miss Asta Langen—who would have been found dead here, several days after you had entered the house?"

"Several days, several weeks perhaps. I would wait until the woman who rented me the house had read in the papers that Asta Langen had disappeared and was being sought for. Somebody would have found her here, and her identity would have been easily established, for I knew that she had some important family documents with her."

Müller was silent a moment, with an expression of deep pity on his face. Then he continued: "Yes, someone would have found her, and her suicide would have remained a dark mystery, unless, of course, malicious tongues would have

found evil reasons enough why a beautiful young lady should hide herself in a lonely villa to take her own life."

Müller had spoken as if to himself. Egon Langen's lips parted in a smile so evil that Amster clenched his fists.

"And you would not have regretted this ruining the reputation as well as taking the life of an innocent girl?" asked the detective softly.

"No, for I hated her."

"You hated her because she was rich and innocent. She was very charitable and would gladly have helped you if you were in need. Besides this, you were entitled to a portion of your father's portion. It is about thirty thousand guldens, as Mr. Fellner tells me. Why did you not take that?"

"Fellner did not know that I had already received twenty thousand of this when my father turned me out. He probably would have heard of it later, for Berner was the witness. I did not care for the remaining ten thousand, because I would have had the entire fortune after Asta's death. I would have seen the official notice and the call for the heirs in Australia, and would have written from there announcing that I was still alive. If you had come several days later, I should have been a rich man within a year."

His clenched fists resting on his knee, the villain stared out ahead of him when he ended his shameless confession. In his rage and disappointment he had not noticed that Müller's hand had dropped gently on the desk and had softly taken the little bottle from under the handkerchief. Langen came out of his thoughts only when Müller's voice broke the silence. "But you miscalculated, if you expected to inherit from your sister. She is still a minor, and your father's will would have given you only the ten thousand guldens."

"But you forget that Asta will be twenty-four on the 3d of December."

"Ah, then you would keep her alive until then."

"You understand quickly," said Lengen, with a mocking smile.

"But she disappeared on the 18th of November. How could you prove that she died after her birthday, therefore in full possession of her fortune, and without leaving any will?"

"That is very simple. I would have bought papers up to the 4th and 5th of December, and left them here with the body."

"You are more clever even than I thought," said the detective dryly, as he heard the commissioner's step behind him. Müller put a whistle to his lips and its shrill tone ran through the house, calling up the policeman who stood by the door.

Egon Langen's face was gray with pallor, and his features distorted, yet there was a ghost of a smile on his lips as he saw his captors enter the door. He put his hand out, raised his handkerchief hastily, and then a wild scream echoed through the rooms.

"I have taken your bottle, you might as well give yourself up quietly," said Müller calmly, holding his revolver near Langen's face. The prisoner threw himself at the detective, but was caught and overpowered by Amster and the policeman.

A quarter of an hour later the cabs drove back toward the city. Inside one cowered Egon Langen, watched by the policeman and Amster. Berner was on the box beside the driver, telling the now interested man the story of what had happened to his dear young lady. In the other cab Asta Langen sat with the friendly commissioner and Müller.

"Do you feel a little better now, my dear child?" asked the commissioner in sympathy, as he patted her cold hand. The girl nodded and said gently, "I feel as if some terrible weight were lifted from my heart and brain. But I don't think that I can ever forget those dreadful days, when I already had to accept it as a fact—that I was to be murdered."

Dietrich Theden

Well-Woven Evidence

Dear Friend: It is but a few weeks since I had the pleasure of meeting you again in the house of your brother, and of realizing that I have still the honor of your friendship. At our last meeting we could spend our time in the pleasure of renewing the memories of our youth and of calling up for ourselves equally pleasant hopes for the future. I come in a different matter to-day; in deep distress of mind, and turn to you, not only as friend, but as chief of police. As my friend I would like to go into the matter more with personal detail, but as I come to you officially to-day, I will limit myself to a short, concise report, and to the request that you may send me a well-tried and capable criminal official to give me his aid in this unfortunate affair. The matter is as follows:

On Sunday, the 18th of June, the safe in my business office was robbed of the sum of 58,000 marks. As you know, we live here in a small town, and it is not possible for us to take the day's cash to the bank every evening. We are therefore compelled to care for it ourselves for several days. It has always been my practice, however, to avoid allowing more cash to accumulate than we needed for the week's work; ten, or at the most, fifteen thousand marks were usually all that we had in our safe. This Sunday in question, however, there had been an unusual number of large payments the day before, which had been sent to us direct, instead of, as usual, to our bank in Hamburg. The cause for this had been a private exhibition in our building of a number of new wares, new designs and textures, for the inspection of which representatives of our most important clients had come in person. They had taken

this opportunity to pay off bills which had been allowed to run on for some time. The gentlemen all left us by Saturday evening, and on Sunday morning my cashier and myself went over the money in the safe and checked off the amounts again. Therefore the theft must have occurred either on Sunday afternoon or during the night from Sunday to Monday; of course I cannot tell which; but when I entered my office on Monday morning I found my clerks in great excitement. The window panes had been smeared with soap and broken in from the outside, the large safe had been moved from the wall and the back broken in. All the gold and paper money, to the amount above mentioned, was gone, but the envelopes with drafts had been untouched.

There were no other strangers present when the payments were made. There remains, therefore, only the, to me, very sad explanation that some member of my business force must have thus ill repaid my confidence. I could easily lose the actual amount of money, but my relations with my employees are such that the thought that I might find the thief among them would depress me most terribly. There is nothing proven as yet, and I can still hope that some outsider may have committed this crime—indeed I wish from the bottom of my heart that it may be so. But our researches hitherto have proved absolutely nothing. If you can send me one of your men I will be very grateful for it. And I would be particularly grateful to you if you could telegraph me at once if I may expect anyone and whom. In old friendship,

JOHANN HEINRICH BEHREND.

P. S.—Simply to complete my report, not because I believe it to be of any importance, I would add that the thief took also a large package of lace curtains which lay in my own private office.

J. H. B.

Commissioner Wolff dropped the letter and sat in deep thought. Then he turned his cold gray eyes on his chief and asked in a business-like tone:

"You'll allow me a few questions, sir?"

Police-senator Lachmann nodded.

"Mr. Behrend has been a friend of yours from your youth?"

"We were at school together and have been friends ever since."

"May I ask what is meant by the pleasant hopes for the future of which Mr. Behrend speaks?"

The senator was silent a moment. Then he said, "Why, yes, of course. I know you so long and have given you so much confidence already that I feel sure of your discretion in what is purely a personal family matter. I have, as you know, an only daughter. It is the heartfelt wish of the parents in both families that my child and my friend's son should be united in a bond that will bring us all still closer together."

"Thank you, sir. When will you send the answer to Mr. Behrend?"

"At once, I thought."

"May I ask that you do not telegraph?"

"Certainly. I will send a letter if you prefer, and you may dictate it yourself. I will send it with a personal letter of my own."

The commissioner took Behrend's letter and the newspaper and went out. He returned in fifteen minutes and handed his chief the following letter to be signed:

Mr. Johann Heinrich Behrend, Sr.,
Neuenfelde, Holstein:

Sir: Permit me to inform you herewith that I have given our Criminal Commissioner Wolff the necessary leave to make researches into the affair of the robbery from your office. I am sorry to say, however, that the commissioner is still occupied in the investigation of another crime, and that it will be several days before he is able to leave here. At the latest you may expect him in four days, however, and his work for you will begin at once after his arrival. As you are still continuing your own researches I hope that the

small delay will not be of any importance. The unavoidable delay before our office was notified at all has already given the thief an opportunity to put himself and his loot in safety. The commissioner has his orders to report to you personally at once on his arrival.

CHIEF OF POLICE LACHMANN.

Senator Lachmann could not control a slight smile. "To-day is Friday—hm—according to this they will not expect you before Monday—hm." He signed the letter. "When do you start?"

"In an hour, sir."

"And when will you be in Neuenfelde?"

"This evening, sir."

. . . . . .

A single passenger descended from the ten o'clock train of the same evening in Neuenfelde, a gentleman of military bearing, in clothes of fashionable cut, with a sharply marked face and cold gray eyes.

He proceeded to the office of the firm of Johann Heinrich Behrend & Son.

A servant in a quiet gray livery took his card and handed it to the chief of the firm. Mr. Behrend, Sr., read the card carefully: GEORGE ENGEL, REPRESENTING HARRY S. EGGER & SON, LONDON AND BERLIN.

"Take the gentleman to Mr. Juritz, Franz," he said. "I will be glad when my son is at home again. This affair has made me so nervous that I dislike to see anybody new."

"Just as you say, sir." Franz threw an anxious glance at his master and went out.

Bernhard Juritz's office lay next to that of his employer, another door leading from it into the room where the safe stood. The cashier sat in a comfortable armchair, and pressed his hand to his forehead when the servant brought him the card, as if he had first to collect his thoughts, and bring himself back to the affairs of everyday life.

"Send for Detlev." When the clerk had entered Juritz

asked, reading aloud the name and the firm on the card, "Has this gentleman been announced to us?"

"No, Mr. Juritz."

"Thank you." He dismissed the clerk with a wave of his hand.

"Mr. Behrend told me to send him to you," remarked the servant.

"All right, send him in."

He turned over some letters but rose from his chair as Engel entered. The latter's manner was so decided in his firm politeness that he compelled an equal attitude.

"What can I do for you?"

When they had both seated themselves, Engel told his errand in a few words. The London firm which he represented was to open a branch shop in Berlin, and he had been appointed manager. The Berlin branch desired to accord all honor to any German national sentiments and to acquire a good stock of home-made wares, as well as those of foreign make. It was his duty to seek out the most important manufacturers of the country, and eventually to sign for the orders. The firm of Behrend & Son had such an excellent reputation that it was to them at first that he had come, to examine the factory and the specimens of their work, and to place his orders at once if all should be as he expected.

While Engel was speaking, Juritz had taken up a paper-knife with which his fingers played mechanically. Engel's sharp gray eyes glanced keenly at the man opposite him.

Juritz's sharp-featured face showed energy, but the dull glance of his eyes and the foolish play with the evidently unheeded instrument in his hands showed a physical and mental weakening, for the moment at least. His low forehead and broad, full-lipped mouth pointed to strong animal desires, and the dark rings about his eyes were evidence of dissipation.

When Engel had finished the cashier turned to him, and the dullness of his eyes brightened just a trifle.

"Your orders will be large ones, presumably?" he asked.

"From 100,000 to 150,000 marks' worth."

"Hm! well, then you of course will excuse me if I make my investigations as to what security your firm offers for such a large sum."

"Naturally. The German Bank in Hamburg, which is in constant connection with our London house, will give you all information. Besides this, it is our custom to pay cash on all our orders."

The cashier wrote down a few notes. Even in the most important houses the prospect of orders of such size would have awakened considerable interest and attention. Juritz remained absolutely calm.

"We are very appreciative of your coming to us, Mr. Engel. You may be sure that if we do close our dealings, we will serve you in the best manner. I am taking for granted that you will remain here for several days? Then you will perhaps come at this time to-morrow? I will report to my chief and will ask that he see you himself."

. . . . . .

Late that afternoon the Behrend carriage drove past the Inn. It contained Mr. Juritz and another gentleman.

"Aha! the secret agent," cried the landlord, who stood at the window with Engel.

"The secret agent?" repeated the stranger.

"The one they sent us from Kiel, I mean, the criminal official. He's driving with Juritz."

"Are they out for fun?"

"Probably. Or they may have found a new clew. They have been driving around through all the villages in the neighborhood for the last week. The local authorities watch every man who comes or goes from any of these places."

"Hm! Mr. Juritz and his companion take things easy," said Engel. "I think I'll take a little walk myself," he added, and went out, turning his steps towards the Behrend house. When he had learned that the head of the firm was at home, he sent in his card and was received at once.

Mr. Behrend arose at his entrance and, after greeting him,

pointed to an inviting-looking armchair which stood beside his large desk.

"My representative has told me of the very flattering connections that you may possibly make with us. Permit me to give you my thanks, and to say that we will endeavor to show our appreciation of your confidence in every way."

The old gentleman's manner and tone were so full of quiet dignity that his visitor felt drawn to him at once. Behrend, Sr., was not particularly imposing in appearance, not quite so much so as Engel had imagined he should be as the head of a great enterprise, and a self-made man. But the high forehead and clear eyes of the delicate looking man of scarcely medium height had an expression of such high intelligence that it was quite easy to understand his success.

"May I ask your permission to drop business for to-day?" asked Engel. "I am come now to tell you of my sincere sympathy for you in this unfortunate affair which has recently happened in your house. During the past few weeks I have been traveling a great deal, and while in Paris chance brought me together with the head of the Hamburg firm, Lachmann & Co. From them I heard much about you and your splendid business; of course they knew nothing then of this unfortunate robbery. I learned of it first here and wish to assure you of my sympathy."

Behrend gave him his hand.

"Many thanks. Yes, fate has dealt hardly with me. I do not understand it at all yet myself. It may even remain a riddle forever—in fact, I do not know whether I perhaps myself do not wish that it may. So you met Lachmann in Paris? I have known him from my youth and have just now requested his brother, who, as you may know, is the head of the Hamburg police force, to send me a capable official who may be able to throw some light on this sad affair. I am sorry to say that the official who has been chosen cannot be expected before Monday or Tuesday—several days more without any help, therefore."

Behrend shook his gray head. It was evident that the

affair depressed him deeply. There was something almost pathetically helpless in his attitude when speaking about it.

"Yes, I know the brother is senator. I have known the family for years, through our London house. I met the senator's daughter—his only child, I believe—a couple of years ago in Heligoland. She is a young lady of unusual beauty, and I believe of great character also. She was just nineteen years old then."

A charming smile brightened Behrend's face.

"Yes, indeed," he said, "Hedwig Lachmann is a sweet child, pure, and true as gold."

Behrend continued the conversation about the family of his friend for some little time, and Engel, who seemed to know them all very well, won his confidence rapidly. He came back, finally, to the question of the robbery, and was able to put the old gentleman through what was almost a cross-examination without his realizing it.

"And you have no suspicion of anybody?" he asked.

"How should I? I believe firmly that none of my employees could have had anything to do with it. The official from Kiel joins me in this opinion, as does my cashier. But in spite of this Juritz has made researches among the men, very carefully but very thoroughly, without any result however—or with one result, at least, that we now know that our confidence has not been deceived."

"That would, indeed, be a cause for rejoicing. Have they found any clew on the outside?"

"Not the slightest."

"And the thieves left nothing behind them that might betray them?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Ah, indeed! that certainly does look like professional work. The case begins to interest me. Might I see the safe, Mr. Behrend; I mean the damaged one?"

Behrend rose at once and led his guest into the strong room. The offices were empty, only the servant Franz was busy in one of the rooms.

The safe still stood where it had been pushed out from

the wall. The back had been literally torn apart. Engel recognized at once that it had been done by the strongest sort of instruments used by professional thieves. He noticed one thing: the fact that of the two compartments used for money, which were closed with their own particular doors, only one had been opened. Had the thief known that the currency was kept in this compartment? or had it been mere chance that led him to this place first? In this case he might have had enough in the rich booty that he found there, and did not care to seek further. Engel was so lost in thought that the manufacturer had to repeat his request that they might now drop this unpleasant theme.

"I suppose you feel the same as I do," said Behrend, smiling. "I had never seen anything like that before, and the sight fascinated me. But now come with me and do me the honor to take supper with us. My wife will join with me in greeting you as our guest."

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The large drawing-room was full of warm comfort. Engel's glance fell again and again on the superb lace curtains that hung before the high windows.

"Those are really quite the handsomest curtains I have ever seen," he said finally. "The design is superb and the workmanship really remarkable. I must congratulate you; they are your own manufacture, I suppose?"

"Yes, indeed, and they are the pride of my good Juritz. The design was made for the Russian Prince Perkalow, and has not been put on the market at all. There in the middle, where you see my monogram, the other specimens have the monogram of the prince, with his coronet. With the permission of the prince I kept back two pieces of the original set, which I hoped to exhibit sometime. But it was just these curtains that our friend the robber took with him. The gentleman certainly has artistic taste, has he not?"

The examination of the factory next morning took about an hour. Juritz was a good leader and explained everything clearly. Engel listened and looked in silence, showing

his attention by an occasional single word or nod. He bade farewell to the cashier and sent in his card to the head of the firm. Mr. Behrend was engaged and the visitor had to wait in an anteroom. On the table here lay an album, which he began to study with interest. The large volume held at least five hundred photographs, evidently employees of the firm. Engel turned the leaves hastily. On the first page was a large picture of the chief, all by itself. Then, on the next side, not Juritz's face as he had hoped, but that of someone unknown to him. They were evidently arranged according to time of service. Engel turned over the next leaf. Yes, there it was, Juritz's characteristic countenance. With a quick motion Engel removed the picture from the book and slipped it into his pocket. Then he called the servant; "I am afraid I should only disturb Mr. Behrend now. Tell him that I can come to-morrow morning just as well."

He left the building and went to the railway station. "Second-class, Kiel, excursion." He arrived at noon and went at once to the police station.

When he had sent in his card he explained: "I am a friend of the firm Behrend & Son, and would like to take some more active interest in the researches into this mysterious robbery. I believe I have discovered a clew and would like to put in a request for official aid. Should I be mistaken, nothing need be said about it; but if I am not mistaken, the police can only be grateful to me. What I have discovered is this: One of the employees of the firm—his name need not be mentioned as yet—is frequently absent from Neuenfelde, and is said to be here in Kiel, on pleasure bent. He leaves Saturday evening and returns Sunday evening or very early Monday morning. From hints let drop by people in Neuenfelde, I understand that the gentleman leads a rather gay life here, and to discover the truth of this is the reason for my coming. Here is his photograph. I would ask that you would let it circulate among your officials that we may find out whether any one of them has ever seen the gentleman, and where."

The picture wandered from hand to hand through the rooms until finally a policeman declared that he had seen the gentleman not very long ago—two or three Sundays past perhaps, in the restaurant Wriedt, where he was frequently stationed. The gentleman was there with a lady.

"Did you know the lady?" asked Engel.

"No, sir."

"She was not one of the gay world?"

"I think not, sir. She was very well dressed, but not in any way conspicuous."

Engel took an official with him and started out for the restaurant. And here he let the picture circulate again. In a few moments one of the waiters declared decidedly that he knew the gentleman, and that he also knew the name of the lady: "Lore Düfken." He had often heard her called Lore, and once when the gentleman had introduced her to someone else, he had heard her last name. He had remembered it because it was so like his own, which was Düfke.

"Does the gentleman spend much money here?" asked the police official.

"He has a couple of bottles of wine usually, and he orders champagne occasionally, but his bills are no larger than those of many others."

It was easy to discover the address of the lady in question through the official Census Lists.

"Since you are acting on a mere suspicion," the official said to his energetic companion, "you had better be very careful. What excuse will you use to enter the apartment?"

Engel smiled. "That is very simple. When going up the stairs I will remember any one of the names on the doors and ask for information about the owner of it. Don't you think you could use me in your business?"

"Don't be too sure of yourself. I will wait at the next corner there, in the cigar store."

Engel climbed the stairs and rang the bell at the door upon which stood the name "B. Düfken, widow."

An elderly woman opened the door.

"Have I the honor of speaking to Mrs. Düfken?"

"Yes, what may I——" She interrupted herself and looked sharply at the gentleman, whose decidedly aristocratic appearance made her appear to doubt whether it was proper to let him stand outside the door. "Won't you please come in? I will be at your service in a moment."

Engel entered a little reception room, the attractive furnishing of which held his attention at once. The question arose in his mind as to where all these evidences of riches came from. The furniture, in English style, was noticeably new. The chairs and tables, the upholstery, were perfect in finish. The only part of the room that showed any use at all was the heavy carpet. The ladies who lived here must be very well off—or else this extravagant outfit was very much out of place and was not here by right or reason. This last opinion grew more decided in Engel's mind when the woman entered again and he could see her in the clear light of the room. There was nothing refined or aristocratic in her appearance, her manner was awkward, her clothing very ordinary. She was one of a kind that could be seen by the hundred anywhere, a woman brought up in quite other surroundings than these, and who had evidently not yet been able to adapt herself to affluence.

Engel carried out his purpose and asked about the gentleman who lived on the floor below. The old lady was evidently a gossip, and had so much to say about her neighbor that it was very easy for her visitor to lengthen the time of his stay and to win her confidence. When he could find absolutely nothing more to say about the gentleman on the floor below, he began to compliment the woman on her beautiful home.

"My dear madame," he said with apparent eagerness, "if I were not afraid of asking too much of your kindness I would make still one more request. Would you be kind enough to show a stranger like myself the other rooms of your charming home, which I know are just as attractive as this one?"

The woman smiled, evidently flattered. "Why, of course, if it really interests you," she said.

"But please do not do it if it disturbs you in the least," said Engel in polite entreaty.

She opened a side door. "This is our finest room, our drawing-room." She led Engel into a large corner room, which was furnished and decorated throughout in rococo style. It was all of the very best, and quite expensive enough to be absolutely out of keeping with the owner of it.

In the next room they found a young woman in a white house-gown, who turned her bright brown eyes on the stranger in curiosity, and then quickly pushed aside her work, which covered almost half the floor, so that they might enter. The young lady, evidently the daughter of the other woman, was very pretty, slender, and graceful, with a delicate face and attractive expression. Her movements were extremely elastic and noticeably graceful, so much so that she would have attracted Engel's attention had his eyes not fallen on the curtain spread on the floor. It was a heavy lace curtain of richest design and workmanship. A similar—no, the identical design of those he had seen in the Villa Behrend! And there, half ripped out, was a monogram with a coronet.

Engel had to struggle for control. "My dear young lady," he said, "I must beg your pardon for this invasion. I am afraid I have disturbed you."

"Oh, that doesn't matter," answered the girl, with a sweet, rich voice. She noticed the interest with which her visitor looked at the curtain and she continued with a laugh, "Isn't it pretty? but look at this coronet here! What should we want with a coronet? I am just ripping it out, and it's no easy work, I assure you!"

"The curtains are a present, I suppose?"

"Yes, my fiancé gave them to me. The design was made for some foreign prince, and he is the only one, besides us, who has such curtains—except a thief who stole the last samples from the factory. Nice sort of company to be in,

isn't it?" She said the words quite harmlessly, with a touch of humor.

"Stolen?" asked Engel.

"Yes, last Saturday, my fiancé—but no one knows of our engagement as yet—sent these curtains here, and during the night from Sunday to Monday, the last two samples were stolen from the factory, when the safe was robbed."

"A safe robbery? How interesting!" asked Engel, as if in surprise.

"Why, yes, in the house of Behrend & Son, in Neuenfelde. Hadn't you heard of it? The papers were full of it." And she told her visitor all she knew about the robbery, in her interest letting the fact escape her that her fiancé's name was Juritz.

. . . . . .

In the autumn of the following year the wedding of young Behrend with the daughter of Senator Lachmann was celebrated, and a most welcome guest at the festivities was Commissioner Wolff, now called by his colleagues in the office, "The Angel (Engel) of the Lace Curtains."

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